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THE STORY OF HEREWARD

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THE STORY OF HEREWARD

THE CHAMPION OF ENGLAND

BY

DOUGLAS C. STEDMAN B.A.

DUBLIN UNIV. PRIZEMAN IN ANGLO-SAXON AND MIDDLE ENGLISH AUTHOR OF "HEREWARD—A ROMANCE"

ILLUSTRATED BY

GERTRUDE DEMAIN HAMMOND R.I.

"Let him work who can, high
deeds ere his deathday,
That for every warrior lifeless
lying is afterwards most fitting."
BEOWULF

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Preface

THE main source of this story is the mediæval chronicle of the life of Hereward, *De Gestis Herwardi incliti militis*, but I have also drawn upon the following ancient records, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Chronicles of Florence of Worcester*, the *Chronique de Geoffroy Gaymar*, the *Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, the *Ecclesiastical History* of Ordericus Vitalis, Ingulf's *Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, and the Histories of the Norman Conquest by Professors Thierry and Freeman.

Of the *Gesta Herwardi Saxonis* Professor B. Ten Brink says: "The Latin account of the deeds of Hereward the Saxon arose, to judge from appearances, in the first part of the twelfth century. It may here be noted that the author mentions, as one of his authorities, the history of Hereward's youth from the pen of Leofric of Brun, a priest in Hereward's service. He says that this Leofric had endeavoured to become acquainted with the deeds of the giants and warriors from ancient tales (*fabulis*), or from trustworthy statements, and to record them, which he seems to have done in the English language."[1] Mr. Stopford Brooke tells us that the *Gesta* contains old songs, "some of which may have been actually sung by Hereward himself."

With reference to Ingulf's Chronicle I am fully aware

[1] Translated from the German by Horace M. Kennedy.

that it has been proved to be later than Ingulf's time. But there is no doubt that it contains much genuine tradition.

There is perhaps little need to say that the Chronicles of the Middle Ages are sadly lacking in detail. Wherefore a would-be biographer has to draw upon his own imagination to a somewhat large extent, especially where the incidents of the youth of his hero are concerned. I have endeavoured to be true to the spirit of the times in chapters i. to v.

In the remaining part of the work I have followed the *Gesta* very closely, and, with the exceptions stated above, there is no chapter in the book that is not based upon some ancient record of Hereward. Scarcely anything that would not be suggested—to a close reader—by the words of one or other of these Chronicles has found a place in the present book.

For the arms of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, and therefore of Hereward, "the German eagle for Leofric borne on a bend gules," I have followed the admirable work of Lieut.-General Harward, *Hereward the Saxon Patriot.*

For the route by which William approached Ely, I am indebted to Mr. L. Gomme's introduction to Macfarlane's *Camp of Refuge.* But it is made practically certain by the place-names Cambridge and Aldreth in the *Gesta.*

The incident (chap. x.) of Hereward's single combat with Harold Hardrada is, perhaps, a somewhat daring innovation. But I trust its description is true to the spirit of the period, and what more natural than that the two most famous champions of the day should seek to show their valour on each other's crest?

The name Sigtryg for the son of the King of Waterford, I owe to Kingsley's well-known romance *Hereward the Wake*, and the name of Hardrada's henchman, Eric Ulfsson, to Mr. Fred Whishaw's work, *Harold the Norseman.*

Contents

CHAP.		PAGE
	Foreword	xi
I.	Youthful Adventures	19
II.	The Great Wrestling Match	38
III.	What Befel Thereafter	53
IV.	The Doom of Edward the King	62
V.	How Eustace of Boulogne fared at Dover	74
VI.	Romantic Work in Northumbria	85
VII.	Romantic Work in Cornwall	100
VIII.	Tidings and a Vow	112
IX.	Of the Lily of Provence	121
X.	Of Love and a Great Fight	141
XI.	A Dire Spell from England	158
XII.	Wild Work in Bourne	166
XIII.	How Knut's Nephew dealt with England	181
XIV.	Of the Camp of Refuge	197
XV.	A Doughty Deed	209
XVI.	Except Hereward alone	231
XVII.	Of the Rose of England	246
XVIII.	The Wages of Sin	260
XIX.	The Lamp Flares Up	266

Illustrations

	Facing page
"I shall own one of those one day"	*Frontispiece*
The lad ran his fingers over its strings	34
"She would be willing to die for them"	40
"I have broken the peace-strings!"	60
She stood as if framed in a picture	66
"You only will I serve, lord," said he	76
"Thou shalt live to love, and live to hate, and pray to die"	98
"Carry my message to Sigtryg, my love"	110
"As my blood-brother shalt thou be"	116
Torfrida sat alone in her boudoir	140
The desperate situation was, for the time, forgotten	172
"How now, my Deda?"	200
Then was the chant renewed once more	220
"Lady, we are betrayed!"	236
Alftruda answered lowly, "Me"	250
The Nun answered not one word	276

The gods must die,
Alone immortal lives
The White flower, Fame,
Earned by a glorious life.

Odin in the *Edda*

Foreword

FULL justice has never been done to the memory of Hereward. Several writers, learned men among them, have tried to ascertain with certainty his life story. They dispute, in the first place, about his father and mother, who they were that had the honour of owning such a son. Some say that his father was the great and noble Earl Leofric, who possessed nearly all central England in the reign of King Edward the Confessor, and that his mother was the Lady Godiva, whom you may have read of in a poem by Lord Tennyson. Others say that his father was one Leofric, Lord of Bourne, in Lincolnshire, and that his mother was named Ædiva. But the Lord of Bourne, in the days of Edward the Confessor, seems to have been one Morkere. However, if the Lord of Bourne was named Leofric, there is no reason why he should not also have been Earl of Mercia. And the scribe who wrote out the *De Gestis Herwardi incliti militis* may well have mistaken Godiva for Ædiva in the curious manuscript writing.[1] Be that as it may, and although it seems most probable, from the command he held in the Camp of Refuge at Ely, that Hereward was of very noble birth—for the Anglo-Saxons were particular as to such matters, and would not have allowed a man of low birth to have held command over the heads of such great noblemen as Earls Edwin and

1 This is suggested by Mr. Kingsley, and becomes probable when one considers the curious shape of the Saxon "g."

Morcar, who were at Ely—we know that he was all noble in another sense of the word, a Patriot indeed. And there is no nobler title. We know that he was banished from England in the reign of Edward the Confessor, we know that he returned on hearing that his mother's estates had been assigned to a Norman, that he avenged the death of his young brother, Godwin; that he sacked the rich monastery of Peterborough to save its riches from falling into the hands of the newly-appointed Norman abbot Turold, a sort of fighting priest of the type of Odo of Bayeux; that he then flung himself into Ely and was given chief command of the Camp of Refuge, and that when that famous stronghold was taken, he, with a few devoted followers, cut his way through the foe and took to the "merry greenwood"; that then, after many successes against the Normans, he was induced to submit to William, and afterwards fought well for the King against the men of Maine; that he died in peace and honour, a loyal subject of an alien King, or that he was treacherously slain in England or France, fighting, with Winter at his back, against some thirty Norman knights, of whom no less than sixteen were slain by the two baresark Saxons. All this we know, and it is enough to inspire every true-hearted Englishman with devoted love for the memory of "England's darling," as he was called.

Perhaps no English hero is as interesting as Hereward. We know for an absolute certainty that Hereward was a real man who performed heroic deeds for England, and whose life, notwithstanding, is coloured by the fairy glow of mystery, from which emerges the suspicion that in the latter part of his life he exhibited failings which proved him to be one with mortal men. But this does not detract from the greatness of this "last of the English,"

as Hereward was called by Charles Kingsley, who, I venture to think, used the term in the sense that he was the last great defender of the England of Hengest, Ælla and Cerdic, the god-descended Saxon line, against a horde of adventurers commanded by one who, notwithstanding his magnificent ability, was, in every sense, an alien usurper.

Personally I have but little doubt as to which is the true account of Hereward's end. He was surrounded at Bourne by Normans, all of whom had a blood feud, or quarrel of some sort, with him, the fruit of the late wars; and when we remember the intolerance of the Normans toward the English, and the jealousy with which the great Saxon patriot in particular would have been regarded for his splendid defence, which had aroused in William feelings of the utmost admiration; remembering, above all, that it is a *Norman* chronicler, Geoffrey de Gaymar who relates the heroic death of Hereward in fight with some twenty to thirty knights, and relates, too, that sixteen of these knights fell in the fight, we cannot, I think, reject this account. For such a death is in reality a glorious victory, and the Norman would hardly tell a story against his own countrymen, unless that story were well known to be true. Moreover, Geoffrey tells us the words of Ascelin, one of the Norman band, who, after the death of the dread adversary, remarked that had there been four such men in England they would have driven King William and his Normans back into the sea, and swore by the virtue of God that he had never seen so brave a man. This account of the death of Hereward is supported, moreover, by a genealogical roll of the Seigneurs de Brunne. The other chroniclers are either silent as to his end or assign to him a peaceful death and burial in Croyland Abbey. This

latter account may be found in the *Chronicles of Croyland Abbey*, by Ingulf, who was Abbot of Croyland in the lifetime of Hereward. Although these Chronicles are now declared by scholars to be spurious, yet they may, of course, contain much true history resting upon tradition. The account of Ingulf is supported by the *De Gestis Herwardi incliti militis* (concerning the deeds of Hereward, the distinguished soldier), a Latin mediæval chronicle founded upon the actual Anglo-Saxon manuscript of Hereward's scop, or minstrel, Leofric, the Mass Priest of his men. This man, we are told, "had endeavoured to become acquainted with the deeds of the giants and warriors from ancient tales (*fabulis*), or from trustworthy statements, and to record them, which he seems to have done, in the English language." [1] Professor Bernhard Ten Brink, to whom I owe the above, further remarks, with regard to Robin Hood: "Such outlaws were at all times favourite popular heroes, but this was especially true in the Norman period, when (at the beginning at least) a sort of national, and even patriotic feeling was mingled with the sympathetic admiration for them, and when the terrible severity of the Game Laws drew down the bitterest hatred upon those who had to see them executed. The poetic fancy, therefore, early took possession of the history of such heroes." This then, is a simple explanation of such stories in the life of Hereward as may puzzle us. However, I may here remark that in all the accounts which tell us of his great deeds there is only *one* that does seem impossible, that is, that when he had killed Earl Frederic Warrenne at King's Lynn, in Norfolk, he cut his way from the inn through the knights of the Earl, "killing

[1] *See* Ten Brink, *English Literature*, vol. i., where he says that this Latin *Gesta* "contains beyond all question both truth and poetry," and assigns it to the twelfth century.

three or four at each stroke, himself unhurt," as Charles Kingsley tells us. The writer has never met with any other famous deed of Hereward that could even be called improbable—much less impossible.

I must briefly touch upon another question. Hereward is said, in the *De Gestis Herwardi* to have been married, at St. Omer in Flanders, to a beautiful and wealthy lady, Torfrida by name. He brought her with him to England about the year 1069 and she afterwards retired to, or was placed in, a convent, probably Croyland. Hereward was, at his reconciliation to the Conqueror, married to a wealthy Saxon lady of royal descent, Ælfthryth by name. Now some authorities, as the *De Gestis Herwardi* hints and as Charles Kingsley assumes, hold that Hereward put away Torfrida and married Ælfthryth in order to secure William's favour and the possibility of male heirs. But, as Freeman thinks, Torfrida may have been dead at the time of this second marriage, or she may have voluntarily retired, leaving Hereward free to marry again. Here, as before, I leave the reader to form his own judgment, merely subjoining the passages from the *De Gestis Herwardi*, which, I must observe, ought to be considered as bearing some weight.

In the interval the wife of Hereward before-named, Turfrida, had begun to turn away from him, because he had at that time very often received messengers from a lady most powerful from her wealth (she was the wife of Earl Dolfinus) asking him to take her to wife after asking for licence from the King, which he could obtain for the mere asking, as she had heard from the King's own mouth, if he were peaceably disposed and were willing to give him his adherence. For this purpose, and charmed with the beauty of the lady, Hereward gave his consent, because there was no one more beautiful or comely in the realm than she, and hardly any one more eminent in wealth. Wherefore he sent messengers to the King and demanded the lady aforesaid, declaring that he was willing to be reconciled to the King's Majesty. The King received the messengers graciously, and appointed a day for him, agreeing to what he had demanded, adding that he had for a long time

been wishing to receive him into his favour. But the real wife of Hereward, about whom we have just above made mention, by reason of this went to Croyland, and chose the better life, taking the veil of a nun. On this account *many evils happened to him*, because she was very wise and helpful in giving advice at an emergency. For afterwards, as he himself often admitted, many things happened to him not so fortunately as in the time of his success.[1]

Ingulf, Abbot of Croyland, successor to Ulfketyl, and appointed by the Conqueror, has, on this point:

At length in Flanders, he (Hereward) married a damsel of noble birth, Turfrida by name, and by her had an only daughter, who is now surviving and living in our neighbourhood, and has been lately married to an illustrious knight, Hugh Evermue by name, lord of the vill of Depyng, having brought with her her patrimonial estate of Brunne and its appurtenances. Her mother, Turfrida, coming to England with her husband, on seeing the multiplied changes of this transitory world, at last, with the permission of her husband, abandoned all the pomps of the world, and received the monastic habit, in our monastery of Croyland, at the hands of Wulketul (*i.e.*, Ulfketyl, a Dane, the predecessor of Ingulf), the lord abbot. After having long lived a most holy life under that garb, she died recently, hardly four summers since, and lies buried in our monastery.[2]

Now of these two passages one, the first, which (according to Professor B. Ten Brink, dates from the first part of the twelfth century, that is to say thirty or forty years after the events described, distinctly states that Torfrida "turned away from Hereward because he had at that time very frequently received messages from a lady," and the second, Ingulf's account, which, despite the fact that it is now utterly rejected as a contemporary account, still, no doubt, contains much genuine tradition, the second, I say, hints at the reason for the separation of Hereward and Torfrida in the words, "on seeing the multiplied changes of this transitory world."

Lieutenant-General Harward, who in his most patient

[1] The translation from the *Gesta* is that of Rev. W. D. Sweeting.

[2] Quoted from Ingulf's *History of the Abbey of Croyland*, translated by Henry T. Riley, B.A.

and admirable work *Hereward, the Saxon Patriot*, has, at great length, tried by means of all manner of official records to trace the whole genealogical history of the "clan of Hereward," if such an expression may be used, says: "His first wife, Torfrida, was probably dead, as Freeman suggests in his *History of the Norman Conquest*. Nothing more is heard of her after she entered the convent, nor is there any mention of her taking holy vows. Hereward seems to have been free to marry again. . . ." But elsewhere I have shown that Ingulf states that Torfrida received the monastic habit at the hands of Wulketul or Ulfketyl. And there is not, I think, a single other point upon which Lieutenant-General Harward agrees with Professor Freeman, whom he stigmatises, in my opinion rightly, as being "partial and unsympathetic" to the Saxons, as "slighting Domesday record," and as having produced "a mere fulsome glorification of the Conqueror."

The main questions connected with Hereward are, then, the circumstances surrounding his marriage with Ælfthryth and those connected with the manner of his death. What is certain is his splendid defence of Ely in the years 1070–1071, previous to which he undoubtedly led on the Danes to sack Peterborough on June 2, 1070, the object being to prevent the wealth of that great abbey from falling into Norman hands. Domesday Book has some records of him. For instance, that survey has mention of a Hereward, holding, under the Count of Menlau in 1086, lands formerly possessed by our hero. He seems to have rented lands belonging to Croyland Abbey, at Rippingale, Lincolnshire, leased to him on condition that the abbey should be supplied with a certain quantity of provisions. In this agreement Hereward does not appear to have fulfilled his part, for the Abbot

of Croyland resumed the lands before Hereward went into exile. There is good indication that Hereward was somewhat lawless in his youth. But if so, he amply atoned for all thereafter by his "valour shewn on 'Norman' crests."

And now to our story of this great Englishman, who struck the last blow for England, and who held the last spot of free English land until it was betrayed by English monks to the invading Normans. Standing outside Croyland Abbey, beside the curiously designed Saxon coffin-lid, with its simple device of a floriated cross (if the writer has read it correctly), said by the Rev. T. Le Bœuf to have once covered the body of mighty Hereward, one feels how fitting are the words of the poet Collins :

> How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
> By all their country's wishes blest !
> When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
> Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
> She there shall dress a sweeter sod
> Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.
> By fairy hands their knell is rung,
> By forms unseen their dirge is sung :
> There Honour comes, a pilgrim gray,
> To bless the turf that wraps their clay ;
> And Freedom shall awhile repair
> To dwell a weeping Hermit there !

Sleep in peace, thou Light of Liberty, thou hast won the immortal white flower, Fame, thou livest for ever in the hearts of the loyal and true !

DOUGLAS C. STEDMAN

The Story Of Hereward

CHAPTER I

YOUTHFUL ADVENTURES

Gay Hope is theirs, by Fancy led,
Less pleasing when possessed,
The tear forgot as soon as shed,
The sunshine of the breast.

GRAY

A TRAVELLER passing along the quay of the ancient port of Boston, in Lincolnshire, in the year of grace 1048, might have observed two boys sitting carelessly on the very edge of the wharf, their legs dangling loosely over its ledge. Had he passed in a boat his attention would probably have been drawn to them by the very loud and authoritative tone in which one of them was speaking. This must have struck even the most casual observer as unusual in a lad of such tender years—for neither of the two could have been more than twelve years old—and therefore the lad's excitement and anger would have attracted more than passing notice.

With regard to their appearance they both were dressed in the ordinary garb of Saxon boys of the period, that is, in the case of the one who was speaking, a white linen tunic and leggings bound with crossed slips of deer-hide. The tunic of the second boy was coarser and

made of some kind of wool, nor did his arms and fingers blaze with rings and bracelets as did those of his companion, who also wore about his neck a heavy gold torque or necklace. The hair of both, exceptionally beautiful in the case of the boy first mentioned, hung in loose ringlets of gold to their shoulders. Both were well-made lads with round, well-proportioned limbs. The first was very sturdily built, and his face, as he raised it to gaze across the harbour, was remarkably handsome though, indeed, peculiar, in that a difference in the colour of his eyes—the right one being grey and the left blue as the cloudless sky above him—imparted a forbidding, nay, a somewhat threatening aspect. His lower jaw, too, was long and heavy, but, as I have said, his face, on the whole, gave an impression of extreme comeliness and displayed, in the quick glances that he turned upon his companion from time to time, such a variety of expression as would have delighted a physiognomist. Intolerance, pride, courage, and boundless will were plainly shown, as also a high breeding, apparent in a certain languor that occasionally came into his eyes, as if to say that he could not be troubled with argument, that what he had said must remain for ever fixed, immutable; who liked might take it, who did not approve, leave it. His beauty was of a strange sort—that of the mountain lake when the summer lightning plays across it.

His companion was of slighter build, but well made. He was taller, and his face had far fewer marks of character. His dreamy, far-off gaze seemed that of a boy more likely, in years to come, to be a poet or scholar than a man of action. Now, as he gazed out to sea, it seemed as though his eyes sought to scan the future, and that his mind was more occupied therewith than with the forcible language of his companion.

"I tell you, Leofric," the latter was saying, "that it is no use in the world your telling me these tales. I know my good mother sets you on, and I know that the thieves of monks at Burgh make use of you to try and bring me to a 'better way of thinking,' as they put it, but I'll never be a monk. No, never! I hate them and all their kind, except my Uncle Brand, and they might have spared themselves the trouble of sending you after me and Winter this morning. What a time he is gone! I wish he would hurry himself more when the son of Leofric sends him on an errand."

"Lord," replied his companion deferentially, and in a style and manner beyond his years, "it was not the monks that sent me, but your lady mother, to ask you to return forthwith, as she wishes to speak with you."

"Of course she does, you idiot," replied the lad. "You do not think that I do not know what she has to say. It is about the books that Winter and I turned upside down in the choir this morning—serve the canting monk-rogues right—I wish we had burned them all. I do not want to learn their lies. What does a Viking care what St. Peter or St. Felix or St. Cuthbert did or said, ages ago. See," he went on eagerly, "there," pointing far out to the horizon, "I shall own one of those one day, or perhaps several, and I will burn and destroy all my foes, and make fame and name and wealth for myself; I shall never get the last by staying here you know, with my father giving his lands and rents every day to these canting thieves who, by Odin, care far more for the worldly treasures of honest men than they do for their 'spiritual welfare' that old Leofric the abbot talks about."

"Yes," said the other solemnly, "it is as I have always said, your heart is with the Vikings, the free-booters, the men of war, rather than the men of God, warriors

though they are, too, Hereward. Oh, that you would turn to us and use your splendid powers to promote the peace and happiness of men, rather than their strife and sorrow; would that you desired their love rather than their hate. I seem to see your future even now, Lord; it will be great and glorious in the eyes of men, but its path will be marked with blood and death, with fire and rapine, with broken hearts and sorrow. Have you never thought of those vows which, as we have been told, our sponsors took for us at our baptism and——"

He was interrupted by his companion who, with a loud laugh, cried, "A curse on the fools who promised more than they could perform. Let me alone. I'll cut my way in the world. As for you, since you seem so fond of baptism and as there is plenty of water just beneath us, why should you not have a second." And the headstrong boy cast his strong young arms around the slim body of his companion and, raising him fairly from his feet, cast him straight into the harbour. Then, with eyes, in mock piety, upturned to heaven, he said with affected gravity, "I promise for Leofric that he will be a fair good type of a canting monk, that he will sing twenty psalms a day, at least, that he will repeat forty aves and forty credos, that he will——"

Suddenly he was interrupted by a voice behind exclaiming: "Why, what have you done now, Hereward? You forget that our Leofric is not much of a swimmer." The speaker was a lad of much the same age as Hereward and of a build curiously like his own. He had just set down on the quayside a large 'black jack' or skin pitcher filled with some liquor. "And look," he continued, "what is that boat approaching so rapidly?"

Hereward, looking up, perceived that the strange vessel that he had remarked before was now quite close

to the swimming boy. Her deck seemed to be alive with tall warriors in shining byrnies, or coats of mail, and one of these was leaning over the side of the vessel with a long rope poised in his hand.

In a second Hereward had balanced himself upon the edge and the next he was in the water, striking out for Leofric. Reaching his side he placed one arm beneath his companion's chest and, guiding him therewith, he made, with the other, rapid strokes towards the quay.

"Ha ha," cried a loud voice on the vessel, "run her up, rowers, here are two who will sell fairly to the King when we get to Waterford."

The boat was urged rapidly forward by many a pair of stout arms and ere the boys could reach the side of the wharf, that long rope with its noose had tightened beneath the arms of both, and they were hauled on board like a pair of hooked fish almost before they knew what had befallen.

Instantly they were surrounded by a group of men. "Bind their arms, Olaf," cried a very tall warrior, who appeared to be in command. As the warrior addressed stepped forward to carry out this order, the boy Hereward, recovering himself, applied his foot with the touch of a practised wrestler to the side of the man's knee, and as he stumbled—an inevitable result—the little lad, seizing the man by the shoulders, followed up his advantage with a quick jerk, which caused the fellow to turn a complete somersault into the sea. There were angry cries from his fellows. "Cut the young wolf-cub down, since he seems so surly," shouted more than one. "No, no," said he who seemed to be the leader, "get behind and bind them, men."

"Winter," shouted Hereward to the boy on shore, who seemed inclined to spring into the sea but was

hesitating from the apparent hopelessness of climbing the vessel's side. "Winter, raise the good townsfolk and let the fyrd march out to chastise these thieving dogs."

The lad addressed turned and ran swiftly into the port, from which there could now be seen on all hands folk hurrying about, and more than one spearshaft glistening in the afternoon sun.

Meanwhile, the Vikings had surrounded the two boys who, with backs against a mast, had both drawn their daggers. It seemed likely that, although their case was hopeless, some man would be injured if they were to be taken alive.

"Back, you fools!" shouted Hereward, in the old Mercian tongue, which was not at all hard to comprehend for these Northmen, who had so many of their kin living in East Anglia, "back, I say, or I shall hurt some one! Don't you know friend from foe? I shall be one of you full soon."

"And a likely one thou wouldst make," muttered the leader. "Yet must we have thee and thy mate to sell to King Ranald of Waterford, he will pay us a fair price for ye! What now! Well, you are a beauty!"

As he was speaking, five of the men sprang upon the two boys. One seizing Leofric's wrist bent it back with such force that the bone almost cracked and the dagger clattered idly to the deck. Not so was it with the other. Deftly presenting the point at an advancing hand, with the swiftness of lightning he changed its direction and, bounding upon the man on his right, he plunged the blade into his neck just above the topmost of the linked rings of his byrnie, a deadly stroke. With a groan the man dropped like a stone on the deck, his blood spurting in the face of the striker. Immediately it touched him the boy seemed as one possessed. With a loud cry, aban-

doning his position at the mast, he hurled himself upon the foe, and a dagger stroke savagely aimed at the nearest went clean through the man's wrist and stuck there! With a hoarse roar of anger the wounded man dashed his axe down full upon the fair head beneath him.

Down went the lad on the deck and, in a minute, both were secured with cords. Had it not been that the dagger thrust had caused the Viking to turn his hand in pain even as he struck, one of the boys had needed no binding.

But now the crew of the ship found other work to do, for from the quay which was now alive with Saxon peasants and fishermen there came whistling aboard the vessel a hail of arrows, spears, boathooks and stones. In answer to this the Danes, with far truer aim, hurled a few spears in return, and more than one Englishman, throwing up his arms, sank upon the quay to rise no more.

"Veer her round for the open," shouted the commander, "there are too many for us here. Now round the coast for Waterford, and let us sell these two young devils to King Ranald."

"That shall you never do while I am on board," said a quiet voice. "One of those boys has fought too well. I'll swear by the head of Sleipnir that he will never be a slave!"

The speaker was a youth of some fifteen summers, gorgeously bedecked in shirt of mail, with a flowing blue robe upon which was embroidered a large raven in black. His arms were adorned with gold bracelets, and upon the fingers of his hands were many glittering rings. He had the black raven hair of the Dane, and his whole aspect was that of one born to command men.

"What, Prince Sigtryg!" cried the commander, "it was no part of our agreement with your father when we

took you on this leding that we should give up our honestly-won prisoners."

"But I do not ask that, Iarl Asbiorn," replied the young noble. "All I ask of you is that instead of giving yourselves the trouble of sailing north and right round the English coast to Waterford in order to sell your captives to my father Ranald, you should sell them instead to Sigtryg his son. If you do this there is no need of sailing away at once, and I will give you two thousand silver marks for the lads and, when we get to Waterford, a gold arm-ring to each man of the crew."

A shout of delight hailed this proposition, and the boys were at once brought to Sigtryg's side, one led and the other carried.

"But what will you do with them, my Lord?" asked the tall chief.

"That you shall see," answered Sigtryg. "For the present be pleased to haul down that raven and to hoist a white flag." He spoke in a tone of authority that even Iarl Asbiorn, the brother of King Swegen, of Denmark, who was commander of the ship, did not seem to care to gainsay. Down came the raven, and a square of white canvas affixed to the flagstaff now fluttered in the breeze, and the Viking ship once more approached the land.

Quick indeed were the landsfolk to answer the signal, for the boy Winter had informed them of the name of the captive the Danes had made, and much did they dread the wrath of the great Leofric, Earl of Mercia, the benefactor of Chester, Coventry and Peterborough, the lord of nigh half of England. What vengeance might he not exact from them for having allowed his second son to be carried off by a sea-rover single-handed?

The Danish vessel drew alongside the wharf, and Sigtryg who had been bathing with his own hands the

head of the boy Hereward, uttered an exclamation of delight, as the latter, raising himself on his elbow, gazed around him in some bewilderment.

"Tell me thy name, brave boy," said Sigtryg. "See, I am about to give thee back to thine own people. Thou art too brave for slavery, nor would my father have kept thee when I had told him of thy gallant fight. Tell me thy name for, by Odin's eye, I love thee!"

"What is my name to thee?" was the curt answer. "Well is it for thee, at least, that thou givest me back to my people. But as for that hound there"—and the boy pointed straight at Asbiorn—"he shall rue the day that he tried to enslave Hereward Leofricsson."

"Why so!" laughed the young prince, "thou hast told me thy name, my young Beowulf, and in return know that I am Prince Sigtryg, son of King Ranald of Waterford, and thy friend if thou wilt."

"Have it as thou will," replied the boy with the utmost indifference. "Little reck I who is my friend or my foe. Yet I thank thee, and thou shalt learn one day what it is to have the goodwill of Hereward, son of Leofric."

Any one less good-natured than was Sigtryg would assuredly have turned away disgusted at the overbearing, conceited tone of this child of twelve years, but the Prince only laughed quietly, and himself assisted Hereward over the vessel's side. Leofric, uninjured, jumped on shore and turning, respectfully saluted their benefactor.

As the ship veered about, Hereward's face changed somewhat, and leaning forward so far that, dizzy from the blow the Viking had dealt him, he would assuredly have stumbled again into the water had it not been for his two young companions who supported him from either side, he shouted to the Prince:

"Farewell, Sigtryg, my friend! Know that Hereward

never forgets a kindness. I will render it thee again, fear not, and yet again. And for thou," to the tall Iarl Asbiorn, "learn that Hereward is also mindful of injury. Beware, tall man, beware!"

Sigtryg, with a smile, waved his hand to the boy, while Asbiorn turned away in contempt, amid a hoarse roar of laughter from the ship's crew.

"Iarl," said a warrior near, "you will have trouble with that lion-cub some day."

"A curse on the young fool," replied the leader. "He has cost me a good man already, and, for all I know, two. Where is the man Olaf that he threw overboard?"

"Iarl," replied the warrior, "he was dragged on board an English boat when we drew off. See, there, they have him on the quay and hale him up to the lad. I assure you I fear for him."

"Peace, fool," replied Asbiorn. "Hela seize thee, I have too much of thy tongue. The English will never dare to injure him!"

All eyes from the boat were now directed to the shore where they could distinctly hear the high-pitched tones of Hereward.

"This," he was saying, "is the dog who first tried to seize us. So!" Turning to a tall man, a Saxon blacksmith who stood close behind, he cried: "Strike me the head from this fellow, Oswald."

The man stepped forward, raising his axe high above his shoulder. The captured Viking, fast bound, calmly regarded him without a quiver of the eyelid.

"Surely," muttered Sigtryg to himself, as he stood on the deck of the ship, while the Danes with fierce ejaculations gathered round him, "surely he can never mean to slay the man, after we ourselves have released him and his companion."

The boy Hereward had advanced a step or two and was now standing exactly face to face with his captive, intently watching his countenance. The arm of the blacksmith jerked backward so that the handle alone could be seen. Another second and the captive's "earthjoys," as the old English poems have it, would have been over.

"Hold thy hand!" cried Hereward, "enough, he fears not death, he is a brave man! Fellow, thou art free, there is a boat, rejoin thy comrades. Loose him," he added, turning to the Saxons.

"Rather let us flay him and nail his skin to the door of Borough Abbey," put in a lean, ascetic-looking man in the black garb of a Benedictine monk.

"Keep thy tongue still, cloister rat," answered the boy, "or I will shorten it for thee with this," and he tapped the small seax or dagger that hung, in an embroidered sheath, at his left side. "I see that thou art one of our drivelling Peterborough monks. Mind thine own affairs, for I have a long score to settle with thee and thy brethren. Mark my word, it shall be paid to thee, full measure, ay, and overflowing." The monk slunk back with a frown, and the Dane, released, saluted Hereward stiffly, clambered lightly down the quayside and, gaining the boat, with a few sturdy strokes soon won the Viking vessel.

Hereward and his two companions now made their way towards an inn near the harbour. There they called for their horses and were soon riding in the direction of Peterborough. No sooner had they taken their road than the monk might have been observed making his way to the side of the inn yard, whence, untethering his jennet, he quietly followed the boys on their journey.

They had ridden thus for perhaps six miles, the monk keeping at a considerable distance behind the three, whom

he could keep in sight at times at a very long way off, when Hereward, who had been riding for some time with his head bent low, almost upon the mane of his horse, observed quietly to his companions: "There is some one following us, ride you on with my horse between you. I go back to deal with him."

Leofric opened his mouth to expostulate but, before he could utter a word, Hereward had dropped from the horse and had begun to worm his way like a snake among the bracken that lined the heath on either side of the road along which they were travelling. Leofric would have followed, but Winter urged the horses forward muttering: "Little Hereward knows well how to take care of himself, there is only one man." And, indeed, they could now distinctly hear the hoofs of the monk's jennet sounding hollow along the long bare road.

Hereward, although so young, was well skilled in woodcraft, and indeed the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Danish boys were, as a rule, practised in most of the manly and necessary accomplishments of those rough, fighting days. Knowing that he wore a white tunic he chose a friendly chalkpit close at hand and, in a moment was lying along the edge of its sloping bank, awaiting the horseman.

And well was it for him that he was watchful. For the monk, instead of advancing, pulled up his horse and, after gazing ahead of him for a minute or so, turned from the road and urging his jennet to a canter, struck along a small sheep track that ran across the heather-common.

"Now where, in the fiend's name can he be going, and what is the grey fox's plan?" soliloquised the boy as he watched this sudden change of tactics on the part of the monk, whom his quick young eyes had now recognised as the clerk he had seen at Boston. "Ah, but I see," he went on, "there is a farm on his way, I see the

smoke, he is going to get help there to take us back to the monastery for a flogging or worse. Let us try if we can be before him."

Using every bush or thicket as a screen, the boy ran, stooping as he went, parallel to the monk but at some distance, in the direction of the farm. He had this advantage that the monk, mistrusting the heather-land, kept his mount to the track, which did not lead directly to the farm, to gain which he would have to turn some little distance to the left.

Thus it was that Hereward reached the farm first, and, glancing quickly about him, perceived that the monk would be forced presently to pass a rough bridge, consisting of a single plank, and just broad enough for one horseman to ride over. In a moment the boy had drawn from a pouch a coil of wire such as was then used for strengthening the guards of helmets, the hilts of swords or the bands of shields. The next moment this was stretched across the middle of the plank, the ends being made fast to the bottom of a tree upon one side and to the rail of a rough fence upon the other. This done, Hereward, without pausing an instant, ran quickly straight into the garth of the farm and, even as he ran, a loud cry from the main road where it passed the farm met his ears. Pressing on he stumbled over something and fell. Springing to his feet he saw that the object over which he had tripped was a long fen-leaper's pole, made of a stout stave some six feet long and armed at the end with an iron spike, such as was often used by the fen fishermen in that part of England, to enable them to leap over the swamps and marshes dryshod. Snatching this up he gained the road and beheld Winter on his horse supporting Leofric with one arm, while with the other, dagger in hand, he menaced some four or five

peasants who, armed with sticks and stones, were hurrying through the farm gates to bar the path of the boys. Without a moment's hesitation, Hereward rushed forward and struck straight at the bare knee of the foremost, who had a large stone poised to throw. The boy's weapon held in both his sturdy hands struck full on the side of the man's knee and, with a curse, the fellow fell forward, his stone rolling harmlessly in front of him. Quickly the boy had snatched this up, but the second peasant, rushing at him, dealt a blow with his stick at the golden head below him. Hereward dropped his head on his left shoulder and the stick fell with a crash on his right. Dropping the fen pole, the boy raised the stone with both hands and hurled it straight in the man's face. The ceorl, blood spurting from his mouth, fell upon the next following, and in the moment's confusion, Hereward, regaining his pole, leapt upon the horse at his side and with a shout of "In with the spurs, Winter!" dashed forward along the road. Winter snatched the helpless form of Leofric on to the saddle in front of him, and the two fairly flew along the road, followed by the riderless horse and a shower of curses, accompanied by a few stones from the men. A hundred yards or so along, Hereward turned with a shout of "Mind your hayricks and buildings well, ye knaves! I'll smoke the rats' nest out for this, by Odin's face!"

Amid the storm of execration which followed them the boys heard a loud splash, followed by a shrill scream in the Latin tongue, which was greeted with a loud shout of laughter from Hereward, and a couple of minutes afterwards the party swung to the left and were galloping along the road to Bourne as fast as their horses could carry them. They arrived without further accident, and cantered across the old wooden bridge that led into the

hall, very old even then, of Hereward's father, the great Earl Leofric. A long, low building of wood and stone was this, surrounded by numerous penthouses and sheds, the donjon upon a large artificial mound behind it. The hall was encircled on every side by very high grass-covered banks which bore witness to the fact that it had once been a Roman encampment. These banks were guarded at the top by stout wooden pales, and all round below them flowed the waters of Peter's pool, a lovely fountain that bubbled up then as now in the rich meadow land and filled the moat with its waters. The cell that the monks of Peterborough had in these days at Bourne stood on the left and behind the house, and on its site Bourne Priory afterwards arose. All around, without the banks, was meadow land with Elsey Wood and the great Bruneswald or Bourne Wood in the distance.

Arrived at the pool they dismounted and flung the bridles to the serfs of Earl Leofric, who were now hurrying out. Hereward and Winter carried Leofric to the fountain and by dint of much bathing of his head, which had, at the outset of the fray, been struck by a large stone from one of the farm ceorls, succeeded in reviving the boy. For a minute or so he stared wildly about him, and then his gaze became fixed upon Hereward, who was regarding him with an air of amusement, mingled with some touch of scornful pity.

Leofric first broke the silence, addressing Hereward. "Lord," said he, "a boon!"

Now Hereward had no objection, child as he was, to being addressed in this formal style, the tone of a man to his chief; he was, indeed, used to it, for the theowes and serfs of Leofric, who found it well to humour the sons of their lord and master, paid to the child Hereward almost as much observance as they did to Alfgar, the

eldest son, a young man of about twenty years at this time, and heir to the great earldom of Mercia. Hereward, under his cloak of roughness and ferocity, had many a noble virtue, but he did not include among them that of modesty. Strange, indeed, would it have been had he done so! For self-exaltation, in the form of boasting of one's deeds and qualities, was not with the Angles and Saxons counted a fault. Had not great Beowulf, nearly five hundred years before, been of all men the most fond of a "beotword" or boast? Not indeed, an idle boast, for which of his vaunts had he not fulfilled? And thus Hereward had determined it should be with him. His mother, the most pious Lady Godiva, had destined him for the Church, but never had he cared for a proverb of Alfred or a homily of Ælfric, or even for an anathema of Wulfstan of York. Not he; but he had loved and pondered the battle-songs of the Saxons, *Beowulf*, *The Fight at Finnesburgh*, *Brunanburgh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and in fact all the war-poetry that he could obtain. He had enshrined in his soul the image of Beowulf, the mighty chieftain, as an ideal to be imitated as closely as possible. Perhaps a Hereward, he thought, might even surpass him in fame. Utterly self-confident, without knowledge of the meaning of the word "fear"—even as Sigurd, the famous Norse hero had been—and abnormally strong for his age, what might he not, in after years, achieve? And certain was he that he would win by his works that glory which, in Beowulf's own words, "befits best a noble warrior when at last he lies lifeless." Was Hereward, moreover, like Beowulf, to be esteemed by his countrymen the "gentlest of all to his people, the most yearning after their praise?" Those after years were to show this and much more beside. So now he replied with a pretty boyish dignity to Leofric's

"The lad ran his fingers over its strings" 34

words: "Say on and fear not. Hereward hears thee."

"Lord," said Leofric, "from this hour I leave all thought of a monkish life. The tricks of yon monk at Boston and on our homeward road have changed my purpose. If the men of God stoop to such base tricks, better by far be a servant of man. Twice to-day hast thou saved me—once from slavery, and again from death. Let me be thine, then, dear lord, let me be thine, thy scop, thy gleeman. Well do I know to set in their right measures the words of the song, the notes of the gleewood, well can I render them. Let me follow thee to the death, let me hymn thy praise for ever. Forget my fondness for monk-knowledge, at which full oft thou hast girded in the past, and if thou wilt not have me as thy scop, at least let me bear the ash as the lowest in thy following. I am thine from this day forth, ay, and for aye, thine alone." And Leofric, kneeling with bowed head, kissed the knee of Hereward, and with eyes shining with the fervour of intense love, zeal and gratitude to his deliverer, awaited his answer. At last this came, accompanied by a low laugh. "So thou hast had enough of monkish ways, my Leofric. 'Tis well, the warrior-soul in thee is too strong to be confined within the four walls of a cloister. And, as for the first of thy mishaps to-day, I mind me 'twas I that threw thee in the water to baptize or christen thee. Enough, enough, thou shalt have a fresh baptism. Take cudgel, Leofric, and thou, Winter. Let me see the stuff that thou art made of, Leofric. If for five minutes thou keepest thy head, my man shalt thou be. Afterwards shalt thou sing to me to prove that thou art a bard fit to chaunt in the ears of warriors the deeds of their forefathers, to prove that thou canst sing the death dirge of Beowulf, as well as I know thou canst drone forth

the pious cant of Caedmon's hymn. To work, to work!"

The two boys, their cudgels thrown back, now circled round each other, waiting opportunity to dash in. At another time the compact build of Winter, almost as powerful as that of the young lord himself, though he lacked the dashing agility in fight that comes from the tense, active nerve of the high-born, which was shared by Hereward with his brother Alfgar, would have been too much for Leofric, slim, sinewy and tall as he was, but now he seemed inspired, and fought with a fire and dash that puzzled his antagonist, who was forced to give ground more than once. To and fro dashed Leofric, leaping back to avoid the sturdy blows of the boy who had been Hereward's companion, his brother-in-arms, as he called him, since either of them could remember, and rushing in again to return the stroke. For fully twelve minutes they continued thus until, at last, Winter, having dealt a more forcible blow, could not raise his guard in time and the cudgel in Leofric's longer arm, overlapping the parry, took a neat little piece of skin from the forehead of his antagonist.

"Well fought!" cried their umpire, now stepping between the two, for Winter, excited and angry, was about to close with his opponent, "well fought! Be not angry, brother, 'tis fitting that our new recruit should win laurels to-day. Now bring forth my harp, that I may hear him sing."

The word "brother" from the lips of Hereward had always a remarkably soothing effect upon Winter, and he now, obediently, all trace of anger having vanished from his face, entered the hall and reappeared with a harp which Hereward handed to Leofric. The inspired look of the true poet had not faded from the eyes of the

lad, who, taking the harp, ran his fingers over its strings with the supple touch of a practised player, and thus he sang :

"Before these eyes the future dim
Seems to unroll its shadows gray,
And only thee, my lord, I see
Athwart the foeman's bloodstained way ;
A path of glory 'fore thee spread,
Some mighty deed marks each new day,
Shield of the poor, around thy head
Their blessings ring that aureole ray ;
O'er the swan's path thy Viking bark
Glides to bring new realms 'neath our sway,
Defence of ladies in distress,
First at the sword and ash-spear play.
O Paladin, thy glory-tale
Far, far outstrips each minstrel lay,
Thou perfect knight, mine eye be dull
In death, ere dims thine orb of gray.
May my heart break, my liege, and these my harp-strings yield
Ere cease to hymn the red blood glow of Mercia's eagle shield."

And thus did Hereward gain not the least famous of his after famous band—the men who were to strike the last blows for England against the invading Normans. As for Leofric, after serving Hereward as scop and Mass priest for many years, he was to put down in an English book, the substance of which still survives in an old Latin Chronicle,[1] the deeds, good and evil, of his master, ere he sought peace, once more, within those cloister walls which he now renounced.

[1] *De Gestis Herwardi incliti militis.*

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT WRESTLING MATCH

Foot and point and eye opposed,
In dubious strife they darkly closed.
SIR W. SCOTT.

THE Lady Godiva, Hereward's mother, is known to all from the noble deed whereby she saved the poor folk of Coventry from the great burden of taxation which their lord, Earl Leofric, had laid upon them. She had, by the same act, completely changed the character of her young husband, who, in his early years, seems to have been of much the same disposition as were, in after years, his first two sons, Alfgar and Hereward. For when Leofric had laid an additional tax upon his theowes and ceorls, when their burdens were already very great, Godiva entreated him to remove it from them. "If they pay, they starve." And when her lord replied, "You would not let your little finger ache for such as these," she replied that she would be willing to die for them. Leofric laughed and, in mere caprice, set her the task of riding naked through Coventry, promising that he would remove the tax should she do this.

By this deed the beautiful and pious lady won undying fame. By it, too, she so changed the character of her rough spouse that he became of one mind with her, and for the rest of his life was the most pious of all the great

English nobles, and the most generous benefactor of the Saxon church. To him and to his wife, Chester, Coventry and Croyland owed great part of their lands and wealth.

And now the Lady Godiva, who lived for religion alone, and spent all her time in alms-giving and prayer, was righteously angry that her sons Alfgar and Hereward should resemble their father only in his earlier attributes of roughness, arrogance and tyranny. With Alfgar little could be done; his character was, by this time, formed, and his time was spent in scheming at court how he could become, at the death of his father, even more powerful and wealthy than that great lord, and in wild outbursts, during which he would sail round the coast as a Viking, suddenly descend upon some town, sack its minster and more wealthy houses, and put to sea again. For this, in course of time, he was outlawed, mainly through the influence of Earl Godwin, the one man in England of greater power and influence than Leofric, and of his sons Swegen, Harold, Tostig and Gurth.

For between the houses of Leofric and Godwin there was the deadliest enmity and rivalry, and thus the one half of England, Wessex and all the south, was utterly divided from the whole of the Midlands, Leofric's dominion. As for East Anglia, it was held at times by one family, at times by the other. In after years, Waltheof, son of Earl Siward, who now ruled Northumbria and was the third most powerful noble in the realm, was earl of the East Angles as well as of Northumbria and Huntingdon. It is in such great schisms as these in the power of England that we find the main cause of Duke William's comparatively easy conquest. Hereward, Leofric's second son, was still so young that no pains were spared by his mother to bring him up to the calling she desired him

to follow—that of the church. At present he manifested an obstinate dislike for the monks and all their ways, and loved naught but rough games, and fighting with any lad who would contend against him.

On the morning after the adventures at Boston, Hereward received a rather severe reprimand from his mother, and was sent back to the monastery of Peterborough, where the monks, tenacious of their purpose, sought to flog both him and Winter for the damage they had done to the manuscripts, and for their day's truanting. But the two boys broke from them, and arming themselves from the great hearth in the refectory, Hereward with a spit and Winter with a brand, dashed up a narrow stone staircase to the bell-tower, where they successfully defended themselves against all attempts at capture, the monks not choosing to risk their shaven crowns too close to weapons wielded by the strong young arms of their refractory pupils.

After this Hereward declared that he would no longer attend the monastery. Winter and Leofric followed him, and, as years went on, he gathered a band of youths almost as lawless as himself. With these he would visit his father's farms, exacting rent from the tenants and paying his following therewith. His name soon became the terror of all the inhabitants of the towns around —Bourne, Stamford, Deeping, Spalding, Croyland, Peterborough and Boston. At every wake, at every fair, Hereward and his band were sure to be present, and there seemed no adventure, however rough and risky, into which they would not thrust themselves.

The strength of Hereward, the promise of which had been shown in his boyhood, seemed to increase week by week. By the time that he was sixteen years of age,

"She would be willing to die for them"

there was nobody, man or youth, in all the fenland who could win a fall from him in the wrestling ring. His skill at sword and buckler play was proportionate—not a master of fence, and there were many travelling the country, could get the better of him. At running, leaping, hammer-throwing, hurling the spear, archery, he was alike proficient, although the latter exercise, which afterwards was brought to such a degree of refinement and skill in England during the Angevin and Plantagenet dynasties, was not very extensively practised as yet.

The praise of the young lord was in the mouths of all men except, indeed, of those whom, at some wild sport or other, he had injured or robbed. Often his ferocity of character, which appeared to increase with his strength, caused his good parents a great deal of anxiety, as he never accepted with good grace a beating at any sport. So that frequently if a prize were awarded to an antagonist Hereward would turn the play into deadly earnest by drawing his sword upon his rival. Rare, indeed, was it that his opponent could claim the honour of an equal contest with him, but England was full of men and lads, strong and accomplished in manly sports, and occasionally the issue of a wrestling match would be too long in doubt to suit such an overbearing and impatient temperament as was Hereward's.

It befel once that in company with Geri, his cousin, Winter and Leofric, he journeyed to Chester, one of those towns over which Earl Leofric, his father, held sway. The object of the visit was to take part in a great wrestling contest that had been arranged there. A wondrously wrought shield of old time had been found among the hills by a thane of Leofric's, and folk whispered that it had even belonged to one of the world-famed knights of King Arthur, perhaps, from its beauty and worth, even

to the great British king himself. Wondrously wrought, indeed, it was, with golden figures of knights engaged in all manner of adventures engraved round the rim, while in the boss or centre there was depicted a round table at which sat a king with his queen—surely none other than Arthur and his bride Guinevere—and a ring of knights. Now the Welsh around Chester, as may well be imagined, looked on this shield as a sacred relic, and many were the requests sent in to Earl Leofric that he would transfer it to them, that it might be preserved in the palace of their king, Griffith. But Leofric had replied that if they would have it they must win it, and he chose the wrestling match in order to afford them a fair opportunity, and to prevent any possible armed revolt.

So when Hereward and his companions arrived at Chester they soon learnt that there were very many Welsh champions in the old town, all anxious to have the honour of carrying that shield back to their king. And not only Welsh were there, for the fame of the shield had spread, and Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex and Kent had all sent representatives; so that the contest for the prize seemed like to be a long and a hard one. Northumbria had sent Thurstan, a giant wrestler of Earl Siward's, a man of vast height, nearly seven feet, broad in proportion, and, a most unusual thing with men of such great size, agile as a cat therewithal. From Mercia, in addition to Hereward and his companions, there came a noted wrestler from Corby, Godric by name; from Wessex, Sexwold, who had often won the court prize when King Edward, although he loved not at all such exercises, had yet allowed games to be held without royal Winchester, or in London. Kent sent a very famous youth called Wulfric, of scarce twenty summers, who had thrown almost every man south of the Dane-law.

A large circular space of level turf had been marked off without the city and round this clustered the folk of the city and district. Leofric himself was too busy with affairs of the kingdom to act as president; perhaps also, wise man as he was, he had foreseen the possibility of some of the Welsh questioning his award in case the day should go against them. He had therefore asked one of the great rival family of Earl Godwin to take his place, and no less a person than Tostig, the third son of Godwin, had accepted the position. Tostig was among the most handsome young men in the realm, and was very vain of his beauty, and the thought of filling the seat of honour at this important contest, perhaps also of gaining popularity among men of all the earldoms, pleased him. For owing to his extreme pride and ferocious disposition he was, as is well known, much disliked by all save a few, among whom, strange as it may appear, was the pious King Edward himself.

At present the eyes and thoughts of all were upon the wrestlers themselves, who had just entered the ring, and England might have been searched in vain, from the Tweed to the Isle of Wight, for more magnificent specimens of manhood. The pairing of opponents was to be arranged by lot. Unfortunately for the men of Mercia, two of their representatives were drawn to wrestle together, and this caused many angry murmurs from their section of the crowd. Geri faced Godric, and after an exciting ten minutes the constant practice and youth of Hereward's cousin gave him the victory. Further ill-fortune awaited the Mercians. There was not in the Fenland a youth stouter and stronger than Winter, save Hereward himself, and now the former was drawn against Leofric, who had come to take part in the contest, not because he hoped for ultimate success—he knew that that was well-nigh

impossible with so many famous wrestlers present, but because his master was wrestling. This time Winter was able to have his revenge for the advantage Leofric had obtained with the cudgels at Bourne six years before. The scop was lithe and agile, and he used his activity to the best advantage, baffling many of Winter's rushes, but once the latter succeeded in encircling him in his arms the contest was over. Drawing him forward Winter cast himself against his chest and bore him to the turf, pressing both his shoulders firmly against the grass. A fair fall, but Winter had needed all his strength for the remaining contests.

A roar of applause from the large body of Welsh intermingled with the crowd greeted the next pair of combatants. A light, sinewy and fierce-looking young man, with wild keen eyes, broad shoulders, and the quick agile step of a panther, was confronting Sexwold, the court wrestler. The latter was a man of compact build and very powerful in the lower limbs, but his face, in spite of his many victories in Wessex, wore a look of anxiety foreign to it, for well he knew that his opponent was Edric, surnamed the Wild, a young chief for whom Fate had many adventures in store. From the cries of delight to which the Welsh continually gave vent, it was evident that they did not think that the result would be long in doubt. Nor was it. Against the combined strength, agility and fire of Edric the West Saxon had not a chance from the outset. To and fro, from side to side, dashed his tiger-like opponent, seeking an opening. For a time Sexwold, relying upon his superior weight and solidity, was content to remain strictly on the watch. At last even his patience was exhausted and his brain dizzied by the lightning-like movements of Edric, and he made a step forward to try close quarters. Before his foot

had touched the ground his leg was seized as if in a steel band, and he was jerked to the ground with his opponent above him. Even there Sexwold made a plucky fight to sustain his reputation, and struggled for long with one shoulder only on the turf. But at last his wearied muscles relaxed, and Edric sprang lightly to his feet amid the frantic cheers of the Welsh, among whom he lived, and whose foremost champion he was.

The match had now reached a most interesting stage. Every man who had been opposed to the giant Northumbrian or to the Kentish champion Wulfric had been disposed of with ease by one or other of these famous wrestlers, and now the Kentish lad and Hereward were drawn to oppose each other. Two finer specimens of early manhood it would have been impossible to imagine, and murmurs of admiration from the crowd greeted them as they stripped for the fray. Wulfric had the advantage in height; he was fully six feet and his limbs were huge if, as yet, somewhat loose, for he was but twenty years of age. A certain sleepy look in his blue eyes might have had the effect of destroying the impression created by his great limbs, save for his reputation as the finest wrestler in the south of England. Hereward was now a noble lad of eighteen years; short, but of enormous breadth of chest, while his limbs, although not large, were a mass of corded muscle, showing in his arms and legs like the fibres of some strong plant clinging around the roots of an ancient oak. His large eyes were remarkably clear and brilliant, but their difference of colour gave the whole face, otherwise of great beauty, a menacing and almost forbidding appearance. The lower jaw, long and heavy, added to this effect, and to the impression of strength which his whole appearance gave. His hands and feet were small and delicate, as is usual with those

of noble birth, and his long locks of golden hair fell in ringlets to his shoulders. His waist was slim, but the thighs deep-set and of great breadth. Altogether he looked extremely dangerous, and the more so now he knew that the odds were against him, for, should he be successful in winning this fall, he had then to meet the giant wrestler Thurstan, while the Welsh champion Edric was drawn against Winter. All the other competitors save Geri had now lost a fall at some time or other, and the winner of this bout had to wrestle with him.

Utterly self-confident as always, Hereward moved slowly towards Wulfric with a tentative feint at arm or leg as he moved. Suddenly the Kentish man sprang on one side and, darting in, seized Hereward round the waist and strove to raise him from his feet. In a second the younger lad tore the long right arm that encircled him from its hold and, slipping his own left beneath the back of his opponent, jerked him head over heels, a feat which was greeted with bursts of guttural laughter from the ring. As Wulfric stood for a second amazed, the other bounded on him like a leopard, and twisting his fibrous arms around those of his opponent, literally flung himself on the latter's chest. Down went the Kent man, and down went Hereward upon him. Even then Wulfric managed to twist himself so as to rest on one shoulder only, but, shifting his holds with lightning-like rapidity, Hereward at last found the grip he sought, and the Kentish man lay flat upon the ground amid roars of applause from the theowes of Leofric and the Northumbrians, and angry murmurs and gestures from the men of Kent and Wessex.

Now Winter stood forth to face the famous Edric. Strong and of massive build, short-necked and round-headed, the young brother-in-arms of Hereward seemed

to have no mean chance of success even against such a type of strength and activity combined as was the Welsh champion. But years of Hereward's companionship had perhaps made him too self-confident. At any rate, he began the wrestle as if he had here another Leofric, forgetting that, in the man before him, he had one in whom more than Leofric's agility was combined with a strength even greater, if anything, than Winter's. Edric, with his constant springs to evade the grip of Winter, encouraged the latter to underrate him, and when the Welsh champion did at last come to close quarters, Winter found, to his intense surprise, that Edric's strength was fully equal to his agility. Pluckily fought Winter, mindful of his lord's credit, and he used his strength to such purpose that Edric could not, by main force, overcome him. At length, with a half-smile, the young chief tore himself from Winter's grasp and, as the latter stumbled forward, a swift stroke of Edric's foot on the side of the knee sent Winter to the ground, and, bounding upon the wearied youth, Edric completed his victory.

Intense excitement now animated the whole ring. Cheer after cheer rang out from the Welsh, while the Englishmen kept a gloomy silence, for Hereward was drawn to face Thurstan, Siward's gigantic wrestler, and the Saxons had placed their main hopes upon the latter, whose fame had reached throughout the length and breadth of the land. Now, however, he was to be opposed by Hereward, whose wrestling had that day been unsurpassed even by that of the great Anglo-Dane, while the champion of Wales, Edric, had but to meet Geri. After these two contests was to come the final bout, in which the two winners would strive for the shield. Should Thurstan win, thought the English, he would be too weary, in spite of his enormous strength, to be again

successful when opposed to Edric, and the latter, they feared, would have but little difficulty in conquering Geri. So, too, thought Edric the Wild himself, and thus it proved. Geri was strong and as brave as a young lion, but though more active than Winter, he was less massive in build than the latter, while his opponent had more than the strength of Winter, combined with more than Geri's activity. So after a plucky wrestle of six minutes' duration another great shout announced a further triumph for Wales. There was a fierce light of triumph in the eyes of Edric as he gazed to where the giant Northumbrian moved slowly forward to meet Hereward, who, with all the dogged determination of his race in his eyes, awaited him. An intense hush pervaded the crowd.

Now Hereward, although he always had the utmost confidence in his own powers, had a saving virtue therewith, that of prudence—the fruit of experience. It was clear to him that the strength of his enormous foe was at least equal to that of any two men there present that day. So that, were the victory to be his own, it must be won by skill and not by strength. In this frame of mind he opened the struggle. Thurstan was now almost within clutching distance of the lad, when the latter, at the moment the giant's foot was raised in the act of stepping forward to seize him, darted in, gripped the right leg of his foe, and hurling his weight against the chest of Thurstan, sought to bear him backward at a run. But the huge man tore Hereward's arms from their hold and hurled him to fall face forward at least six yards away. Quick as thought Hereward leapt to his feet as the Northumbrian made a swift rush to seize him and, stooping, gripped his foe with left arm around the waist and right beneath the crook of the knee.

Carried on by his own impetus Thurstan flew clean over

the boy's back and rolled upon the turf. There the young Mercian sought to pin him, but, seizing him in his mighty arms, Siward's wrestler drew the lad forward and turned him on one side. Wild shouts from the ring hailed his feat, loud cheers of "Aoi! Aoi! Thurstan the champion! The shield to Thurstan! Aoi!" broke from the Northumbrians. But as the great man rose to force him down, Hereward adroitly slipped through his legs and stood once more, panting, on his feet. For the next few minutes both were content with outplay to recover their breath. At last Hereward, slipping within the great arms, sprang upon the neck of his foe and, locking his legs around the latter's waist, strove to bear him backward. Had the two been of equal weight and strength the ruse would probably have succeeded, but again the giant tore the lad's arms from him and hurled him away. Hereward reeled and in rushed Thurstan, but the clever young noble, recovering his balance, leapt to one side, and, seizing the giant beneath the arms from this position of advantage, jerked him to the ground. Again Hereward sprang upon his huge foe, again he was trying every imaginable hold to force him down, when with a tremendous effort the Anglo-Dane seized him around the waist and rising again hugged him so close that it seemed to folk watching that his every bone must be broken. A wily youth was Hereward, however. As the Northumbrian rose, the lad flung his legs around the thighs of the other and there hung. Squeeze as he might the huge Thurstan could not release himself. At last, from sheer weariness the great muscles relaxed and Hereward, slipping to the ground, to the astonishment of all, cast his own arms around the waist of the giant, advancing his left foot slightly. Seizing the encircling arms the

great wrestler again endeavoured to draw them apart, but they sank deeper and deeper into the flesh. Almost before any one could realise what had happened, the lad swiftly advanced another step and the feet of the giant were seen to leave the ground. Up, up, he went amid the gasping of the crowd, and drawing one great deep breath, the lad hurled his mighty foe clean over his head, to fall with a terrible crash on the turf behind. Then the world turned red to the eyes of Hereward, and the last thing he heard was the voice of Tostig raised in authoritative tones. Then the victor sank to the ground beside his fallen rival.

Winter and Geri, amidst the wild cries of admiration, wonder and applause at this mighty feat of strength and skill, hastened again into the ring, and splashing water upon the face of their young lord, forced wine down his throat, while others bore Thurstan in a litter from the ring.

"Well done, lord!" exclaimed Winter, "collect your strength quickly. There is still Edric to be reckoned with."

Hereward rose slowly and wearily to his feet, when at that moment he heard the notes of a harp accompanied by the voice of Leofric who, overcome with a rapture of enthusiastic delight and admiration at his young lord's success, could not refrain from giving vent to his feelings in song. His clear young voice floated up as he chaunted the great midnight wrestle of Beowulf and Grendel, and the hearts of all were uplifted, the ears of all charmed.

In a moment Edric bounded forward crying, "Quick, Hereward, time presses, and Griffith awaits the shield!"

The grey eye of the Mercian gleamed with a fierce battle-light as the notes of Leofric soared upward, and,

weary as he was, he cried, "Ay, ay, and he will wait until the day of Ragnarok ere such as thou shalt bear it to him. Come thou here and see!"

Taking him at his word the Welsh champion sprang forward, and the two closed without any of the preliminary feinting that had opened most of the former bouts. Wild shouts of "Edric! Edric! Hereward! Hereward!" cleft the air as each in turn appeared to gain the advantage. Much less work had that day fallen to Edric than to Hereward, and the former was comparatively fresh, but in spite of this, such was the strength of the Saxon youth that in no wise might Edric bear him to the ground. For half an hour they strained and tugged, heaved and pulled, but victory inclined to neither. Then rose Tostig and cried, "Cease, cease! this is futile. Stop them, guard! Ye shall decide this to-morrow, before me!"

In rushed the Wessex bodyguard, thrusting the wrestlers apart and, with a fierce exclamation, Hereward darted to Winter, who was standing in a corner of the ring. "My sword, Winter," he cried. "To arms, Hereward's men! Shall we not have the prize a short while more would have won for us? Dog of a Godwinsson," he cried to Tostig, "for this the son of Leofric shall remember thee in time to come!" The Welsh had already seized their swords and a general fight commenced. Hereward and Edric engaged in fierce encounter, no longer in friendly rivalry, but with the lust of blood tingling in every vein. Here again they were so equal that neither could touch the other, and as Hereward was preparing to make one of his sudden onsets they were forced apart by a wild rush of the Welsh, who, more numerous than the English, were gradually getting the better. Some one dragged Hereward within the ring formation the Saxons had

framed, and the fight gradually receded to the gates of the city. There a reinforcement of Leofric's thanes repulsed, for the moment, the Welsh, several men on each side being slain at the gates. The English retreated sullenly through the city, leaving the Welshmen howling and leaping like wolves at the gates. And thus ended that day's great contest.

CHAPTER III

WHAT BEFEL THEREAFTER

At sixteen years . . . he fought
Beyond the mark of others.

SHAKSPERE.

AFTER a time the Welsh, finding no entrance, sullenly withdrew. Osric the Thane, to whom Leofric had entrusted the care of the city during his absence, now proclaimed a banquet in the hall of his master in honour of Tostig Godwinsson, who had presided at the games.

Great was the feasting and great the drinking that night in the hall of Leofric the Lord of Chester. Even Tostig, the cold and proud-hearted, grew genial amid the good cheer, and drank repeatedly to the house of Leofric, and fairly was he answered by Osric and Hereward. "Waes hael!" and "Drinc hael!" the pledge and response of the Saxons, resounded incessantly throughout the hall.

On a sudden another cry mingled with their revelry, a wild, heart-piercing howl like that of a famished pack of wolves, causing every man in the hall to spring to his feet and snatch at sword and shield, which, according to the custom of those times, hung upon the wall at the back of each warrior where he sat at board. Mingled with the weird sound was another, more easily understood, if more menacing, a clanking sound, the sound of the

clash of arms. Osric had doubled the guard against the Welsh foe without; he had forgotten the Welsh foe within.

For there were many Welsh within the gates of Chester, and these had admitted their comrades at some entrance known to them.

On they poured in hundreds up the wooden stairs and along the corridors. "To the door, three of ye!" shouted Osric. Too late: it was dashed open, and led by Edric, the wild, half-clad Celts came pouring into the hall.

With a savage oath Tostig Godwinsson leaped to his feet and poised a heavy javelin above his head. He was checked by Osric, who growled in his burly Midland dialect, "Quiet, you fool, an' you be not tired of life. Not a man of us will see his home again if blood is spilt." Turning to the Welshmen at the door, he cried, "What would ye that in this unseemly wise ye break into the hall of our great earl? It ye have shed blood, be assured that he will exact the penalty!"

Then Edric answered, with difficulty restraining his men at the door, "We do not desire your blood, but the famous shield of great Arthur that hangs behind yon Saxon. That we came to win we will have, and no longer shall the relic of the great dead be dishonoured in the hall of the sons of his foes." A wild shout from the Welsh followed these words.

"Thou hast not won the shield, thou dog," answered Tostig. "To-morrow I appointed for the final bout between thee and Hereward Leofricsson here."

"Dog!" cried the Welsh leader, "darest thou call me so, false Godwinsson? Thou shalt repent that word! Have at them, my men!"

At this the Welsh uttered a wild yell and bounded

forward like panthers. A few paces in front the swords of the English, extended in line from side to side of the hall, checked them for the moment. "Hold!" cried Hereward in a clear ringing voice that rose high above the tumult, "what needs this? Thou hast wrestled with me fairly; come let us finish in honour that we have begun. Now before all we may decide the contest. If thou attackest thou knowest well that an army under Earl Harold will be sent to burn and ravage thy land, even unto the crest of Penmaenmawr. So come thou here and decide with me now the question of this shield. Soon, indeed, shall it be settled!"

A shout of applause from the English greeted his words, but among the Welsh mingled cries arose. Some were for the contest, others against it. It was evident that these latter thought that they could in any case win the shield by force of arms, and were dubious as to the advisability of risking the doubtful issue of this wrestling trial. But Hereward decided the matter.

"Come now, Welshman," said he, "or I will call thee niddering." This word was the most insulting term that could be applied to a Saxon by another, and Edric, as his name implies, was of Saxon lineage. With a cry of defiance, he leaped forward, and ere the Saxons could move the benches the two wrestlers had closed in fierce strife. Some of the theowes, at a sign from Tostig, quickly removed the boards that had formed the tables to the side of the hall.

Edric seemed to realise that, strong as he was, the might of this son of Leofric was more than his own, and in order that the contest should not become one in which strength alone must decide, he sought to avoid close quarters at first, relying upon his activity. But Hereward had, by now, completely recovered from his exertions in the

morning and afternoon, and was now displaying all the agility he had manifested at the opening of the wrestling match. Meeting guile by guile, he gradually forced Edric backward to the edge of the ring of warriors, and, as Edric strove to slip past, Hereward suddenly sprang upon him. The sinewy Welsh champion now exerted himself to the uttermost, but he was no match in sheer strength for the young Mercian, whose abnormal physical powers were to be so strikingly manifested in after days. Suddenly shifting his hold, Hereward gripped his foe by both elbows and ducked his own head until both his shoulders were well beneath his opponent's chest. Then, taking a quick step forward, he hurled Edric straight over his head, ay, and among the English thanes. The young chieftain of the Welsh struck his head against the wooden flooring and lay quite still upon his back.

There was silence for a space. Then the Englishmen burst into loud cheers, while the Welsh, with frantic cries, again drew their swords, and once more bloodshed seemed inevitable. But at that moment the tough Edric rose to his feet and came forward to his conqueror with hand extended. It was immediately seized by Hereward, and as they stood united in this friendly clasp, Edric cried aloud to the Welsh :

" Back, back, my men ! Think ye that the shade of mighty Arthur would be appeased with that which could be won for him only by butchery and not by the fair contest ? We agreed to Earl Leofric's conditions, let us be men enough to abide by them. Some other day we may succeed ! "

As he spake these words, which seemed to have some effect upon the Welsh, fresh cheering arose in the streets, and in the intervals of the shouting all could hear the steady regular tramp of armed men marching. Now

they were so near that the cries of " Hail lord, hail Earl Leofric ! " left no doubt as to the nationality of the advancing men.

" Thou seest, brave Edric," said Hereward, " there is no longer a question of us being butchered. But as for thee, I like thee for thy grand struggle, and it may well be that the shield shall be thine some day. Come, I make thee this promise. If ever we two fight together against one common foe that shield shall cover, not the body of Hereward Leofricsson, but that of his brave rival of former days, Edric, the champion of Wales ! "

The Celtic mind is impressionable, and the Welsh, carried away by Hereward's eloquence, beauty and strength, now cheered him to the echo.

" For me," answered Edric, " 'tis honour enough to have stood against thee so long. What wilt thou be when a man ? In sooth, none is there I would rather have at my side, without considering the shield. And yea, Hereward, methinks a time will come when we shall fight as brothers. An old Welsh bard has prophesied oft to me that I should one day fight on the side of the old æthelings of England. Thou wilt find me ready ! "

The door swung open and upon the threshold stood an old man of most imposing appearance. Leofric must have been well-nigh sixty years of age at this time, and yet few were the grey threads that showed among his long golden locks. Quite unarmed was he, and in his right hand he carried an ivory wand. He was attired in the usual Saxon costume without any defensive armour, his white tunic being covered by a magnificent red cloak.

He glanced around him for a few moments, first at the Welsh, then at his own thanes, and lastly his regard fell upon his son. who was standing near Edric with

pride and self-esteem written plain upon his handsome face. The countenance of Leofric became very stern as his eye rested upon the wayward lad. He fully understood the situation; some of the details he had already received from the townsfolk of Chester, for the rest the piled-up benches and the drawn swords sufficed. Addressing Osric, he asked shortly:

"Is the contest decided?"

"It is, my lord," answered the thane.

Then of Edric, the earl demanded, "Are you satisfied?"

"I am, my lord," replied Edric.

"Then be pleased to return to Wales with your armed men," rejoined the earl.

There were still some angry spirits among the wild Welsh, but there was no gainsaying the Lord of Chester. There was about him that air of command, innate in some men born to be kings, and which expects and receives obedience as a matter of course. This obedience did not fail now. As one man the Welsh wheeled round and marched orderly from the room. To a man they saluted the earl as they passed, each raising his sword to his helmet.

Leofric stepped into the room.

"Osric, escort the Lord Tostig to his rooms," said he. Then, turning to the thanes around, "This meeting is dismissed," he said curtly.

The English formed up and marched past their lord as the Welsh had done, Hereward among them. As he passed his father, the wilful lad half stopped, a questioning challenge in his eyes.

"Hereward," said Earl Leofric, "remain."

Hereward instantly halted, while the body of English thanes filed from the hall. When the great room had been emptied, he looked once more at his father

with the same half-uneasy, half-defiant question in his eyes.

"Hereward," said the earl, "be pleased to prepare to leave with me for London to-morrow morning at early dawn."

"For the miracle-monger's court, I suppose," answered the boy pettishly, as he advanced towards the door.

Leofric regarded him sternly for an instant, then took one stride after him. The lad stopped.

"Hereward," said the earl, still in the same monotonous voice he had maintained throughout the scene: "Hereward, the king is greatly displeased with you and rightly. Every day some new complaint reaches his ears. There is no gathering within any of my lands which does not end, if you are present, in bloodshed. At every friendly contest of wrestling, running, leaping, throwing, archery, my retainers are forced to protect you with arms, unless, indeed, everything goes as you will, and all the prizes are given to you. You have collected around you at Bourne a band of youths well-nigh as lawless and abandoned as yourself. You force my tenants to pay their rents to you, and with my money you support this set of freebooters. Your name, the name of *my* son, is bandied about as that of the drunkard, brawler, and robber of the Fens. Hereward the wrestler, the leaper, the runner, the swordsman, the ash-spear-thrower, is also Hereward the stabber, Hereward the cut-throat. More than one man's blood is already on your soul——"

"It is false," cried the young man, flushing red with anger at the words. "Men I have slain, 'tis true, but never a one save in fair fight. May the foul fiend fly away with him; may the lies cram his throat and choke him that told my lord these falsehoods; may——"

"Hereward," continued the earl without heeding the interruption, "your conduct at court is no whit better. You do some violence to King Edward's pages whenever you meet them. At every wrestling contest at court some young Norman is injured by you. Do you know that young Etienne of Dol was nearly killed by that fall you gave him three weeks ago? Do you know that young St. Jean's life is despaired of from that sword-wound you dealt him in the quadrangle?"

"Well, my lord, were there no further need for despair, so much the better. The proper place for him is surely in Heaven, not in this wicked world. Every man to his right place at last! Let the old monk send his novices back to France if the life in old England is somewhat too rough for them!"

"One word more, you ruffian," said the earl. "You have still to reckon with Leofric, Earl of Mercia. If I have a single fresh complaint against you, letters of outlawry shall be made out for you, and you shall be driven as a wolf's-head from England. What, shall my son dishonour his king, his country, and his noble family, by murder, fire, and rapine, every day bringing afresh to our minds the frightful ravages of the Vikings of old? Be warned! Once again, and from England you shall be driven, to seek repentance in some foreign land, since neither your holy mother, nor I, your father, can in anywise control you."

But these words failed entirely of the effect the great lord had desired. With a shout of joy the lad tore his sword from its scabbard, snapping as he did so the strings which bound the sheath to his side. "Seest thou, lord earl?" he cried, "I have broken the peace-strings! No longer art thou my father, nor thy lady my mother. No sister have I, no brother. This, this

"I have broken the peace-strings!"

alone," and he kissed the cross-hilt, "this is my father, my mother, my sister, my brother. With this will I carve my way to fame and fortune. Have thy letters made out, lo! there are clerks enough at Westminster. Thus, thus, I turn my back on England," and, turning, he gazed with flashing eyes out to the dark expanse of night which brooded over the old city like a mother hushing her child to rest. "Never, once gone, shalt thou see me again, but it may well be that my land shall call aloud to me for help in hour of need. And then I will laugh and turn my back on her as I turn it now on thee!"

In another moment he was gone, and Leofric, the great Earl of Mercia, Lord of Chester, Coventry, Warwick, the second noble of the realm, felt strangely alone. His gaze, fixed on the doorway, softened. Perhaps he was thinking of his own wild youth. And men always think with more kindness of those they have loved when they are gone from them. But the statesman and the monk in Leofric triumphed over the man, and drawing his furred cloak around him as if he feared the chill night air, he passed from the hall with head erect and stately step.

The next morning saw Hereward riding in the train of his father towards London. On his back there hung the shield of the great Arthur—all golden and engraven with a round table surrounded by a king, queen and twelve knights.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOOM OF EDWARD THE KING

O'er the seas in other regions,
Heaven may guide thee to the right.
GRISY.

WHEN Earl Leofric and his son arrived at Westminster on the fourth morning after the affray at Chester, the earl immediately proceeded to a Witenagemot, or meeting of wise men—as the Saxons called their parliament—which King Edward was then holding in his new Hall of the West Minster.

Hereward, left to himself, began to stroll aimlessly about the courtyard of the hall, his head full of dreams of the great deeds he would perform when exiled. Never for a moment did he dream of failure in the hazardous schemes that ran through his brain. "There's little in Midgard that a man cannot win with strong arm and ready wit. First," mused he, "I shall go to my godfather, Gilbert of Ghent. He has his castle in Northumbria and there he tries the courage of his squires in combats between them, ere haply making them knights. When I have won knighthood, I shall go a-leding like Robert the Frison, and perhaps to Spain and Byzantium, as he did, only with more success, I trow. And when I am come to Byzant I will never leave it until I have won my Polotaswarf like Harold Hardrada, ay, nor until I have done as many and as great deeds as even he, the

Prince of Vikings, the Champion of Berserkers, the King of Scops, the Poet of the North, ever did. I shall wed the Kaiser's daughter or, maybe, go to Egypt and marry the Sophy's princess. Many an ogre and dragon will I slay, like Beowulf or Sigurd or Hardrada. Ay, and I will win for myself the proud name of Paladin, as one worthy to be ranked with Roland and Oliver, or any of the peers. And one day England will need me and will send for me, and then I shall answer——"

What he would have answered remains doubtful, for at that moment he heard a faint tittering, and turning, he perceived three Norman pages, lads of about his own age, gaudily dressed in pale blue court costumes, with richly brocaded robes of blue and silver. Hereward at once recognised them as three of King Edward's pages, lately arrived from Normandy as a present to the pious monarch from his cousin and favourite, Duke William of Rouen.

"Ha! the bare-legged Saxon again," said one. "Was it not he concerning whom those complaints were preferred to King Edward but three days agone?"

"Yes," replied the second, "we shall soon be rid of him, and the sooner the better, for he hates us Normans."

"This is he," said the third, "who, the last time he was here, so rudely handled young Etienne of Dol."

This conversation was carried on in the Norman tongue, of which none of the pages dreamed that Hereward had any knowledge, but the young Saxon had spent much time at court in the train of his father, and both understood and spoke French perfectly. Therefore the pages were astounded when he turned to them and said:

"I wonder if there are any other Norman mushrooms about that would like to be planted here in place of the

English oaks. If so, I should be pleased to serve them as I did Etienne."

The Normans started, but, taking heart of grace from their numbers, began to laugh among themselves and to nudge each other.

"How loud he talks, Montague," said one, "the young cockerel crows far too much for his age, he needs to have his comb trimmed."

The boy addressed, whose face bore a softer and more thoughtful expression than those of his companions, turned to the speaker and replied:

"You must remember, Reginald, that although our fathers are lords in Normandy, we are here on a foreign soil, and due respect should be paid to the lords of the land. Hereward is the son of Earl Leofric, a very great man in England and——"

"And an English barbarian," interrupted Reginald, "a low-bred churl who, by the assistance he gives to the Saxon church, encourages the monks in their wicked and blasphemous practices which——"

"I advise you, young sir," said Hereward quietly to Montague, "to retire and leave your companions to reckon with me."

Montague smiled and, shrugging his shoulders, stepped quietly under an archway into a passage leading to the hall. Hereward did not pause an instant. Doffing his cloak, he leaped upon Reginald, and, snatching him up as if he had been a mere child, he hurled him over his shoulder, right on to the sloping roof of one of the yard outhouses. In another second the remaining page had followed Reginald, and a curious scene was now witnessed by Montague, who stood the while smiling under the archway. As Reginald and Brian rolled one after the other from the roof they fell into the strong arms of the

young Saxon, who, catching each as he came, and laughing all the while, threw them back farther each time, until, becoming tired, at length he hurled Brian with such force that he disappeared on the other side of the low, slanting roof. Almost at the same moment, Reginald fell at the feet of his foe. As he reached the ground, Hereward exclaimed: "I have other fare for thee, thou slanderous dog, that didst dare insult my father!"

With these words he was about to dart upon Reginald, but perceiving that the youth, although risen from the ground, could scarcely stand for giddiness, the young Saxon shouted, "Ho! knaves there, bring wine, some of you!"

At this cry, out came running two or three court menials. When they caught sight of the lads, however, they stood staring at Hereward and the swaying form of the Norman page. "What, ye gaping varlets," cried the former, now thoroughly angry, "do ye stand there gasping like stranded fish? In with you, and bring some wine for master Reginald, the king's page, who is somewhat indisposed. Quick, now," cried the imperious boy, "or you shall come to lack the power to satisfy your curiosity, by forfeiting your eyes"—and the menials vanished, Montague also withdrawing.

At that moment a little silvery laugh came ringing from one of the porches and, turning, the English lad perceived the prettiest little maiden possible to imagine. She stood, as if framed in a picture, under one of the curving Norman archways. All in white was she, attired in the picturesque Saxon manner, with falling sleeves bordered along the edges, that, hanging free from her arms, showed like a pair of folded wings. A loose belt of pearls, wreathing her splendid golden hair, set off to the utmost advantage her laughing eyes, blue as the

summer sky, and the smiles that, quick and frequent, flickered over the cherub face like summer lightning over a summer sea. At this angelic apparition Hereward stood gazing in silence, and the young Norman, with all the courtliness of his race, strove to raise his hand to his head, forgetting that his cap was no longer there. But at the first movement of his arm, the dizziness overcame him and he sank helpless to the ground.

The little maid—she was only about ten years of age—broke the silence with another tinkling laugh.

"Indisposed, you say," quoth she to Hereward. "Master Reginald looks very ill to mine eye, and, as he is one of my sweethearts, I must ask what you have been doing to him. Mercy, but I think he will die," and she ran across the courtyard to the fallen lad and gazed into his face, with a pretty concern, real or simulated.

But Hereward, for some reason known to him, did not answer her, he only frowned the more darkly at her speech. A moment later a servitor came out of the hall with a goblet of wine which he bore to the fallen page, who succeeded in drinking it and, with the fellow's assistance, rose slowly to his feet. The man propped him against the wall and approached Hereward with a salute: "My lord," said he, "you are required within at once, by Earl Leofric."

"Then ask the earl to come bring me," shouted the Saxon lad; "I have work on his account here. Out of my way, and you too, little fairy," and, thrusting the man on one side, he sprang once more upon Reginald and whirling him aloft in his sinewy arms, he hurled him with awful force straight against the archway through which the ceorl had entered the courtyard. Reginald sank, an inert mass, upon the stones, blood oozing from his nose and trickling from his head. The servitor

"She stood as if framed in a picture" 66

rushed from the yard and Hereward sprang upon his horse.

"Fare thee well, pretty maiden," he cried, "we shall soon meet again."

"Oh, I will never speak to you more," cried the child, sobbing. "You have killed my sweetheart, Reginald, and he was good to me. Poor Alftruda [1] will have to find——"

"A new lover," cried Hereward, "lo! I will fill his place and be better to thee than ever was a false Norman thief. And so thou art Alftruda, old Gilbert's ward. There will be lances broken for thee, and, mayhap, heads as well, ere the world is much older."

But it was long ere the child would notice him.

"And will you really be kind to me and be my sweetheart instead of Reginald?" said the little maid at last, forgetting her sorrow as children are so wont to do. "And you are Hereward who is so strong and brave and wicked. If you will stoop from that high horse of yours," continued she, with the inborn readiness of a perfect young coquette, "I will tell you a secret."

Hereward stooped from his horse and the girl whispered in his ear:

"You know I was always fond of you because I heard that you were so strong and brave, and, well—you know," and, without a moment's hesitation, she imprinted a kiss upon his cheek, and the next moment found herself snatched from the ground and receiving payment in full measure, some sixty-fold, in truth.

As Hereward set her down, he perceived that they were no longer alone. Indeed the courtyard was now full of men. His father stood opposite him with grave,

1 Her true Saxon name was, of course, Ælfðryð, but I have adopted the "Latinised" form, as sounding less harsh to modern ears.

implacable face; to his right was the great Earl Godwin, to his left a towering form, grey-headed, grey-bearded, with his long wrinkled hand resting on his sword-hilt. It did not need a second glance to recognise in this commanding figure Earl Siward of Northumbria, one of the most renowned warriors of the age, but who seemed, indeed, to belong to some other epoch or to the old days of the demigods rather than to the eleventh century. From his shrunken face, for he was now an old man, the eyes gleamed with an almost uncanny brightness and fire.

And who was he that stood a little distance in the rear, with refined ascetic countenance, whose silvery locks hung far down over his red robe of state, in whose eye, dimmed with age and secluded meditation, could yet be seen the glance of authority. No one could have failed to recognise the last of Cerdic's line, more prelate than king, whose time, as far as possible, was spent in retirement, in seeing fancied visions and in dreaming fancied dreams; whose gold was dissipated in the purchase of fancied relics of saints while the already tottering throne was supported by the vast mental powers of his father-in-law, the great Earl Godwin, and by the strong arm and quick military instinct of his greatest son, Harold. Behind the king stood Harold himself with Gurth and Leofwine, his brothers.

Hereward recognised all at a glance, as he sat there, his face suffused with a proud smile, half questioning, half defiant. The king was first to break the silence.

"So," he cried, in a high, piping voice, "we see with our own eyes ample evidence of those statements our dearly beloved and most pious Earl Leofric has just laid before us. It is seemly and fitting, but quite unnecessary inasmuch as we were already fully informed of your ungodly and blasphemous life at Bourne, Hereward.

You are the source of constant brawls and bloodshed at your home, you insult and injure the pages of my court whenever they are unfortunate enough to fall in with you. Robber, ruffian and stabber, this realm shall hold you no longer. And worse, oh, far worse," he continued, raising his voice till, what with age and excitement, it 'cracked within the ring,'—" you have ere now defied, robbed and even injured the persons of monks of holy St. Peter's Minster at Burgh. And shall we, we who have built this high house for the holy saint, brook that a barbarian boy should make St. Peter's ancient home at Burgh untenable by his servants? I tell you nay. We had already agreed with your father that your next offence in England should be your last and lo! we are not risen from our seat in the Witan the tenth part of an hour, ere we find you maltreating our page—i' faith 'twould seem you have murdered him—and making free with our royal ward, the Princess Alftruda. Enough, enough, let the letters of outlawry be made out instantly."

Hereward had with difficulty heard in patience the strong denunciations of the king and he answered, with some heat:

" Sire, you have called the son of Leofric a stabber and therein, at least, you lied! Yea, lied, sir king!" he continued, smiling carelessly at the angry gestures of the nobles around Edward, " if the blood of men is on my hands, it was shed in fair fight. For your other charges, you were, as you say, 'already fully informed,' therefore they can need no answer. And Hereward Leofricsson thanks his king for the sentence of outlawry from a land where titles and estates are given only to foreign robbers or "—with a glance at Godwin and his sons—" to native houses of mushroom growth. Hereward will

find a land elsewhere, ay, friends and wealth moreover, beyond the seas, and the day will come when England shall need his arm. The Frenchmen fill your land, King Edward, your favours are for them alone—those that the low-born Godwinssons have gained, have been won only through your fear of their power. But when England shall call, who shall say that Hereward will answer. Fare you well, lord king, and thou, fair and sweet Alftruda. And fare ye as ye may, Godwinssons of mushroom growth, that have supplanted the oaks of English land."

With a salute to the king, Hereward turned, but a deep voice fell upon his ear, causing him to stop, for he recognised the tones of Earl Siward, his father's friend, and one whom he greatly reverenced.

"Stay, lad," cried Siward, "thou must not go in this wise. My lord and king," he continued, addressing Edward, "do not drive from English soil such a lad as Hereward for a few trifling roughnesses. What if he hath upset a shaveling priest or two and thrown a Norman here or there"—and he pointed to Reginald upon the ground—"in fair wrestle: there be plenty more in the land whence these came. Young lion cubs, sire, are apt to brawl and fight, you know, but with all that, far better are they than the polished civet cats of the French court whose mouths are full of lies from morning to night. I tell thee, king," he continued, raising his voice until it rang like a trumpet-call, "we shall need men like Hereward soon. Nigh all the strongholds on the south coast are now held by your Norman favourites, and though the old warrior may be blunt of speech, every leader here knows well what that means. Drive him not away, sire, for these paltry offences, your land will need such arms as his. Fence England well, King Edward. Spend

the silver you now waste upon the teeth and feet of the saints upon her armies and coast defences. If you must have teeth and feet, pay for the food that shall meet the teeth of right Englishmen and nerve to the charge the limbs of such as this lad here. Ah, great Knut, hadst thou had such a son, thy line had, it may well be, filled the throne at this hour."

This speech pleased not Edward at all and he was about to make some sharp reply when Earl Godwin, anxious to pour oil upon the troubled waters, quickly interposed :

" Pardon, my lord ; might I suggest that your Majesty in your zeal for the protection of your subjects, both clergy and laity, and of the laws of your realm, may have inflicted rather too severe a sentence upon one whose tender years might excuse some of his follies. Earl Siward has said truth, the Frenchmen fill all our posts of import, their ranks are swelled by the favours, the honours and the gold with which your Majesty is graciously pleased to load them. It may not be long—God grant these old eyes may never see it—ere this your throne, even great Cerdic's seat, shall own a foreign lord."

While Earl Siward had been speaking, Leofric had remained quite impassive, but, directly his ancient rival and enemy, Godwin, took up the word, his countenance changed and a peculiar steely light filled his eyes. Godwin had scarcely ended ere he turned to the king and cried : " Sire, I must request you to abide by your former agreement with Leofric. Shall my son harass and slay the king's subjects every time he hath not all he wishes, as certain more responsible persons who should know better are in the habit of doing," and here he looked at Godwin for the first time. " Be sure of this at least, my lord king, that neither I nor my son, if he hath

anything of Leofric in him, would condescend to accept grace, even at your own royal hands, were the favour granted through the mediation of my lord Earl Godwin or of one of his sons. Therefore banish me this young reprobate, sir king, and the sooner we are rid of such ruffian blades, who remind us daily of the outrages of the heathen Northmen, the better will it be for England."

Godwin smiled at this speech, but his two younger sons appeared to take it less well. Harold, however, was as calm as his father, and his look was sufficient to check any reply that his brothers, save for his presence, might have made. The king, who had appeared rather displeased at the reference to the Normans in Godwin's speech, now waved his hand.

"We have spoken," he said; and turning to a young Norman monk beside him, "See to it that the letters of outlawry are made out without delay."

Hereward, with a boisterous laugh, turned his horse's head once more from the courtyard gate and there addressed the king.

"My liege," said he, "it is perhaps as well that you save yourself trouble in the future by outlawing me at once, for mere nothings. Had you waited but till this even, you would assuredly have had very good ground for the course you now take upon none of importance. But let it be seen that saints are at times as unjust as men. For you, my lord," and he turned to his father, "Hereward's thoughts are even as your own, and for the words you have spoken, your unworthy son honours you. Receive a favour from a Godwin or a Godwinsson! May my name be blotted from the rolls of the honourable on that day! Farewell, Earl Siward, thou grand old chief, ever wast thou a hero of Hereward's youth! And fare you well, King Edward, and look to it that your

spirit haunt me not, to reproach me on that day when this land shall need me and when I, her outcast son, shall refuse to return. Farewell, sweet little maid; remember, I pray thee, wilful Hereward in thy prayers at nightfall. I go, my lord king, to do that which I must, ere I leave for ever the lands over which the House of Cerdic, or rather the House of Rollo, holds sway." And blowing a kiss to little Alftruda, he rode rapidly from the court-yard; unheeding the king, who cried, "Go, oh, apostate, it is naught, very naught." "Would to Heaven," muttered Godwin, "that it were naught, but I know not for the life of me what that lad means."

And he spake the truth. The purpose of Hereward, effected and known, was to be fraught with dire results for the earl and his sons.

CHAPTER V

HOW EUSTACE OF BOULOGNE FARED AT DOVER

> His valour shewn upon our crests to-day
> Hath taught us how to cherish such high deeds
> Even in the bosom of our adversaries.
>
> SHAKSPERE.

HEREWARD rode from the court, heading towards the Kentish coast. The thought as to where, in particular, he should go when arrived at the sea-shore had not troubled him very much. That he would win fame by fair and honourable adventures, of this much he was quite certain; as to where, or under what circumstances, he did not greatly care. The adventures were bound to come; what could any one wish more? Here was he, a lad of eighteen, in the very pink of youth and health and strength, with a good horse between his knees, a good sword at his thigh, harness to his back and money in his belt, and—over and above all—supreme confidence in himself. In truth, what more could he need? But he forgot that there *was* a need of reliance upon some One else, who shapes, mayhap slowly, but none the less surely, the destinies of all men, great and small, in this insignificant corner of the mighty universe.

Howbeit, the world on which he lived was not a small nor an insignificant place to Hereward. To him it was a green and lovely plain, fair-shining, surrounded by water, and on which grew pleasant trees. On the plain,

moreover, were to be found marvellous adventures with lovely princesses, cruel giants, fire-breathing dragons, awesome warlocks, and what not, all of whom were to be had for the taking or the slaying. Treasures had they, likewise, to be won with ease—wonderful wealth, accumulated and keenly guarded through centuries. Ay, it was a good world, and surely somewhere, even should he have to travel beyond the mountains of Cathay, he would find all he sought. At present he had a very definite purpose.

He had not travelled very many hours when he espied a small tavern situated in the midst of a clump of trees to the left of the great road on which he was journeying. The day being rather warm for early May-time, Hereward thought that neither himself nor his horse would be any the worse for a rest. Accordingly he rode up to the inn.

A tumbledown-looking affair it was, built of wood, much the worse for wear, with a roof of thatch. One or two penthouses, propped against the sides of the main building, served as stables for the horses of guests. Two fine elm-trees stood opposite each other in front of the inn, each provided with a rough bench beneath its shade. Upon these benches sat two men, engaged in conversation. One of them, from his rotund form and rubicund countenance, Hereward guessed to be the host.

The stout man rose. "Hola, mine host," cried Hereward, "a horn of thy best ale and see to my horse." And he sprang lightly from the animal into the seat the man had just quitted. This brought him face to face with the other and, at the sight, Hereward sprang up again, more quickly than he had alighted. He recognised at once the sharp weasel-like face, the slim body, and extraordinary length of limb of a certain serf of his father, found by the earl years before, somewhere in the Bourne

lands, and employed as a running messenger and doer of odd tasks at the hall. Of his origin and story none knew anything, but Hereward had always liked the man for his fund of romantic tales of giants, knights, fair maidens, wizards, warlocks and dragons. For the remnants of the old religion of Thor and Woden still survived among the Angles and Saxons, in their belief in innumerable fiends of wood and fen, in pixies, hobgoblins and werwolves into which, at the advent of Christianity, they had transformed the gods of their pagan days. Hereward, when a child, had never tired of hearing stories of these, and it is not surprising, therefore, that a certain attachment between the serf and the lad had been formed.

"What the foul fiend dost thou here, Martin?" demanded Hereward, when he had got over his first surprise.

"You are going to see the world," said Martin, "to become cempa-man and slay giants and enchanters and win undying fame. Now I am going with you."

"Art thou, indeed," replied Hereward, "and wherefore, pray? Best back to thy lord's service with a ready explanation of thy absence from his following. The most thou'lt get in my company is, perchance, a donjon with a rope at the last to set thee free. For how can I help thee?"

The host reappeared at this moment bearing a horn of foaming ale, which he handed to Hereward with much deference, the scarlet robe and gleaming arms of the young lord having had their due effect. Hereward seized the chance of getting rid of him, and sent him off for another such horn for Martin.

"My lord," said the latter, "remember there are a hundred small tasks in which you will need a man. Your horse, your armour will need care. I can run your

"You only will I serve, lord," said he

errands, who better? I can fight for you, and to the death will I follow you."

"That is like indeed," answered Hereward, "but I cannot, for the life of me, see why thou should'st forsake thy service and risk thy life to share the fortunes of an outlaw."

The host again hove in sight and handed Martin his draught.

"My lord," said the runner in a low tone, "you must choose between taking and slaying me. For see, I love you, I have always loved you, and I will follow you until perchance you slay me."

"Slay thee, old friend," replied Hereward; "not so am I minded. If thou wilt follow from simple love, why there's an end, thou shalt share all my fortunes; but, as thou well knowest, they are more like, in the long run, to win me a hempen rope than an earl's coronet. But there's my hand; be true man to me and I'll be true master to thee. Art thou settled on this?"

Martin dropped on his knee and kissed the foot of the young lord. "You only will I serve, lord," said he, "until we go whither those like us go, if priests say sooth." He looked a strange, uncanny figure; his sharp ferret eyes, deep-sunken in his head, shone with a steely lustre beneath sparse eyebrows, his long limbs twitched every now and then with a restless activity like those of some prowling wolf. Covered with grey dust was he, and Hereward guessed that he must have run all the way from West Minster to have been there before the horse. This did not, however, greatly surprise the young Saxon, who knew well the wonderful speed and lasting powers of Lightfoot, as Martin was called. Moreover, Hereward had ridden slowly to save his horse as much as possible. He reflected on Martin's last speech.

"Well, old wolf-hound," said Hereward at last, "if thou hast made up thy mind to go there, I suppose there is naught to be said. Therefore," and he pointed to the horn of ale, "drink, while thou canst, for an the monks say sooth, 'tis little good ale thou art like to get in that service. Moreover thou art dusty, and hast far to go to-day. For me, when my time comes, wherever I go, 'twill be with good weapon to mine hand and good harness to my back. While I have those, I fear nor man nor devil."

Martin Lightfoot raised his horn. "Spoken like yourself, my lord," said he. "Waes hael!"

"Drinc hael!" replied Hereward, setting his horn down empty.

"And now let us to the world, Martin, to seek the giants and wizards, knights and fair ladies of the old-time stories. I shall make a name such as no Englishman has borne before me, not even the famous Alfred himself."

"Ay, lord," replied Martin, "but you will not outshine the great king in one thing, at least."

"And what is that?" asked Hereward. "Not in fighting, dost thou mean?"

"In fighting," laughed Martin, "Alfred was no fighter to be likened to you—at least with his hand-weapons. But you will be far, young lord, from having his great soul. Good chief was he and so will you be, an Martin has power of far-sight remaining to him. But Alfred left a name for mercy and gentleness, as for learning and piety, while the memory of your deeds is like to be a legacy of blood and groans. Nay, men will tell only of your might of arm and skill as a chief. For you are, and will ever be, a child of Odin and Thor."

Martin spoke so sadly that the young lord stared at him for full a minute before replying: "And is

that so grievous a thing, thou strange knave? The old gods were, at least, the gods of men and warriors and——"

"And they that take the sword shall perish by the sword," put in Martin, still more gravely and so sadly that even Hereward himself felt sobered for a moment. But it was only for a moment.

"Why, as for that, man, let it come when it will and I've no doubt as to taking good company with me. Thou'rt not thyself, need'st another horn of ale. Ho there, host! two more horns of thy best, and to the devil with monk cant and prophecies. The best that I wish myself is to die on the holm-gang with Valhalla the Golden for my dwelling thenceforth. And I shall win it. What, man, the boiling blood of all the old Mercian kings—ay, and of those old Saxon chiefs who fought in Germany ere yet our people won this island—hisses and sings through my veins."

Martin sat for a few moments with his head sunk upon his breast. The host re-entered with the drink that Hereward had ordered. Then, of a sudden, a new spirit seemed to possess the uncanny serf. "Ay, my lord," he cried, "at least your life and death shall be those of a man—ay, and a man of men! And that will do for any poor foot-runner. But I love you, and I had hoped . . . No matter. Here's to you, lord, once more, in the Northern tongue, 'Skall, skall! Skall to the Viking!'"

"Skall!" cried Hereward, and they emptied their horns.

Two minutes after found them travelling once more on the great road that pointed ever south. They had covered about two miles—Hereward riding slowly, his man running lightly alongside the horse with his hand on the stirrup—ere either spoke.

Then said Martin: "Lord, this road will lead us to Dover."

"Well," said Hereward, with a half-smile, "is Dover so ill a place from which to embark?"

"Nay," answered Martin, "but 'tis said that the French are there to-day. Wherefore I hurried to overtake you that you might be warned."

Hereward laughed outright. "Thou rogue," said he, "thou knewest that to tell me of the French at Dover was the one way to send me there. As to warning, wherefore should they harm me? But I knew, Martin, boy, I knew, and therefore ride this way. Eustace of Boulogne reaches Dover to-night or to-morrow morn on his visit to the miracle-monger's court and, mark my words, there will be trouble if he is such a tyrant as report hath him. The Kentish peasants are stout to resist oppression, and there may be chance of a right and quick good fight with these alien dogs, and mayhap some pickings too, Martin. Eh, thou knave!"

Lightfoot smiled his curious smile, and looking up at the stalwart young Saxon, he replied: "By Sleipnir's head, there spake a true son of the old Mercian kings. I knew that you would go; 'tis well, we shall have a cut at these Normans before we leave English land. But come, master, spur on your horse; it will be dark long ere we reach Dover."

And indeed the night was fast closing in upon them. Already the great sun was sinking in the far mist-enshrouded sea, seeming, as he sank, twice his ordinary size and colouring the waves with a blood-red stain. Martin pointed to this as he sped on by the side of the horse, which Hereward had succeeded in urging to a somewhat more animated pace. "The red sun sinks in blood,

master," he whispered. "'Tis an omen, the helm of the night will be steeped therein. Hearken!"

And with a swift jerk at the bridle, he pulled Hereward's horse to its haunches.

"What art thou doing?" asked his young master, savagely. "We must get to Dover as fast as may be, else we may lose the spoils."

"Sh-sh," whispered Martin, "canst not hear footsteps coming this way?" And he plucked something from his girdle.

Hereward could now distinctly hear steps upon the road. Faint indeed were they and seemed irregular, but the ear of Martin was as keen as that of a hare, and even at that moment the young Saxon lord could not but marvel at the keenness of his hearing.

"One only," murmured the runner, "'tis well. But who is he that staggers from one side to the other?"

Of a sudden a shrill wailing cry pierced the veil of night; and they could distinguish words, uttered in the Kentish dialect.

"Oh, my man, my man," wailed the voice, "oh, the bloody wolves!"

Hereward dropped his hand to his sword-hilt as a figure halted in front of them.

"More," it wailed, "more of them, then must we die. Strike then, quickly; the saints curse thee!"

"'Tis a woman," muttered Martin.

"Peace, dame," said Hereward quietly; "we be good Englishmen. Tell us what hath befallen thee."

But the woman, even in the dim light knowing the Saxon costume, fell on her knees and, clutching at Hereward's outstretched hand, wailed: "He is dead, my man, dead, dead, dead. The fiend thrust his spear through him. Go not into Dover, good thane, go not, the town

is full of——" But, unable to finish her speech, she swayed heavily and fell in the road.

"Pick her up, Martin," commanded Hereward, "and lay her on yon bank. There is bloody work here, and we must take our share."

Martin lifted the form of the woman in his arms and laid her gently upon the grass by the roadside. Then the two sped forward to the gates of the town. As they neared the wall they could hear, more and more distinctly, the clash of arms, shouts, oaths and screams. Hereward urged on his horse at the welcome sounds of strife, and he galloped into the town crying:

"Here, all good burgh folk, rally for England! Here is aid for ye. Strike in Earl Godwin's name! Strike, strike, or ye are lost!"

At the cry, six or seven men came running to him.

"Are you Earl Tostig?" cried one, "or Leofwine. Here are Eustace of Boulogne and his knights, murdering the townsfolk."

"Get your men together and bar the gates," said Hereward roughly, and even as he spake there came a rush, and he could see, far up the narrow streets, the light glinting upon steel helms and pear-shaped shields the like of which he had often seen.

"Man the gates, good folk of Dover," he cried in a high, piercing voice, "and not one of the cursed Normans shall leave the town to-night!"

Even as he spoke, a serf staggered past him and fell upon his back. A lance, jerked from the falling body, gleamed red in the night. But never again was that lance to do its deadly work. Hereward struck it through, and that stroke took the spearman in the mouth and nigh severed his head in two pieces.

Then, seeing that in the confusion it was impossible

to get orders heard, much less obeyed, Hereward spurred at a line of knights, charging down the street. The first mistook him, mounted as he was, for a fellow Norman, and Hereward rode within his guard. Another second and he had cleft the man to the chin.

"'Ware, lord," cried the voice of Martin, and Hereward had just time to swerve in the saddle as a lance-point thrust past him. The thrust brought the knight too close for sword-stroke. Hereward gripped him by the waist and swung him clean out of the saddle to the ground. Martin, axe in hand, leant over him for a moment.

Then came the rush. Six mounted knights rode stoutly upon them. At their head was a portly man, clad in shining armour, a long lance couched beneath his arm.

"Down with the rabble," shouted he; "force the gates, my men!"

"'Tis he," muttered Hereward, "Eustace himself!" And with a muttered prayer to Thor, he charged at the leader, and snatching the lance in his left hand, smote with his full force at the Norman's head. The knight raised his shield, but such was the might of that blow that the pear-shield split clean in two, and the sword descended upon the helm. The knight, reeling in the saddle, sank into the arms of the next rider, who dragged him from his horse.

Hereward turned as a lance ran beneath his arm, and although it missed his side, it grazed the skin. Two more spears were at his breast. He slashed wildly at the points, while a confused din rose behind him.

When the cloud that had nigh overwhelmed him had passed, he was riding slowly through blood-besprent streets with Martin at his side and hoarse blessings in the Saxon tongue sounding in his ears.

And Eustace of Boulogne, the proud vassal of William, Duke of Normandy, was borne fainting out of Dover on the saddle of one of his retinue. And a few knights only, of all his gallant train, followed him. The rest remained in the Kentish town with nineteen poor honest Saxons dead amongst them.

Eustace had thought to quarter his men where he would and free of charge. The stout freemen of Godwin had resisted, a knight had transfixed one with his lance and had been slain by the peasant's stroke. What had followed has been already told.

CHAPTER VI

ROMANTIC WORK IN NORTHUMBRIA

Thuswise Wyrd oft will be saving
The earl that is unfey, when his valour availeth.
"Beowulf."
(*Translated by* MORRIS *and* WYATT.)

EARLY the next morn Hereward and Martin were ready for their journey. They had thought, by starting early, to evade any possible delay caused by the zeal of the townsfolk of Dover, who were delighted with Hereward's display against the Normans the preceding night.

But they were mistaken in this hope, for a crowd had already gathered without their lodgings and there was a deafening outburst of cheering when Hereward stepped into the street. But the young lord was by no means inclined to delay.

"Good folk of Dover," said he, "ye have already done wondrously well in beating the mongrel Normans from your gates, but look to it that ye do as well in the days to come. Eustace has escaped and has fled to the court —I did my best to send him elsewhere, but Wyrd ruled it otherwise—therefore heed my words. The wrath of King Edward will light upon you for this. Cleave well, therefore, unto your Earl Godwin and call upon him to walk in his accustomed steps, to follow his wonted statecraft, to be, as he has ever been, sworn foe to the Norman

in England. Thus may ye escape the king's vengeance for his guest's over-warm welcome. But for me, I am wolf's-head at this hour ; therefore, an ye would pleasure me, give me a good ship to carry me to Northumbria. Trust me, friends, ye must cleave, heart and soul, to Earl Godwin. Thus may ye be saved, for he is a great and a powerful lord."

Amid the tumult of applause that greeted this speech, which, considering the youth of the speaker, was a remarkably wise and far-seeing address, a clear voice made itself heard :

" And who art thou that fightest and speakest so well ? By thy fair face thou should'st be Tostig, but thou art too youthful, and thy visage is not cruel enough for his. Say, then, which of the Godwinssons art thou ? "

" It is Wulfnoth," cried some one, alluding to the youngest of Godwin's sons, at that time a hostage at the court of Rouen. " He has come back from Normandy with the French, but his heart is English still, as well he showed last night."

" My men," said Hereward, " if I tell you my name, will you still hold me your friend by reason of my help last night ? "

" Ay, ay," cried half a score of voices, " wert thou to pronounce a name as hateful to our ears as that of the black devil himself ! "

" Perchance though," said Hereward, " I may speak a name yet more hateful to ye. Howbeit I am Hereward, son of Leofric, almost as sworn a foe to your lord, Earl Godwin, as he is to the Normans themselves."

These was a slight murmur among the crowd when the name of Godwin's great rival Leofric was pronounced, and one man cried :

" Friends, a son of Leofric is in our hands. Let us

keep him safely and win the earl's bounty thereby." The next instant a tall smith had knocked down the speaker.

"What!" cried he, "will ye have it said of you, men of Dover, that ye let a highborn lad lead ye to battle and betrayed him thereafter to his foe? By Thor, I will break the head of him that stirs a hand!"

"Not so, not so," cried the crowd, "the brave boy is free to go."

"Blessings be on his fair young head," cried an old woman.

"Our ships are yours, good sir," cried two merchants, pressing eagerly forward. "We sail for Whitby this very morn. Where are you faring, lord?"

"Whitby will serve," replied Hereward; "pray set sail as soon as ye can."

"We shall be ready to sail in an hour if the wind is good, fair sir," said one of the men. "Perhaps your lordship will speak a good word for us to the Earl Godwin when next you meet with him. He knows well Olaf and Thorfin Beornssons. We are of Hartlepool, and do much trade with this good town of Dover."

"Ay," answered Hereward, "I shall surely speak ye fair to him. May it avail ye well, *my* good word," he added, in an undertone, to himself.

Thus did Hereward and Martin leave Dover, amid the lusty cheers of the townsfolk, who forgot their dread of Edward's certain and Godwin's possible wrath in their love of a general holiday, and well did they drown their care in copious draughts of mead and strong ale from the various inns of Dover.

The ships arrived without accident at Whitby on the second day, and Hereward, learning that his new friends, the merchants, had business in the famous old town,

decided not to wait for them but to journey inland through Northumbria to the castle of Gilbert of Ghent, an old friend of Leofric, and Hereward's godfather. So they took leave of the merchants and fared on their way.

Gilbert of Ghent, who afterwards owned much land in Lincolnshire and in other English shires, was a Fleming, and a canny one moreover. When he had heard Hereward's story he received him without demur. Outlaw he was, but the times were changeable, and he might be inlawed and in Leofric's place any day. And Gilbert loved right well to stand on good terms with noblemen of such power, wealth and authority.

He had a custom, this Gilbert, of keeping savage beasts in cages of wood and stone, for the purpose of trying the mettle of the young esquires who sought knighthood at his hand. Grey wolves and brown bears he had in numbers, and also one mighty white bear which, rumour whispered, must be some near relative of old Earl Siward himself, who, as all men knew, was a son of the Fairy Bear, as his furry ears fully testified. This was why the family of Siward was called by Angles and Saxons the house of the White Bear. At any rate, this bear was of noble kin, as his father was likewise sire of Biernus, King of Norway.

Great was the interest taken by young Hereward in Gilbert's wild beasts, and often did he long for the advent of Yuletide, when Gilbert was wont to hold combats between the aspirants to knighthood and the animals. Hereward made a firm resolve that his alone should be the honour of meeting the weird beast, the cousin, no doubt, of Siward Digre himself.

Meanwhile he became a great favourite with Gilbert's lady and her maids of honour. He had a great gift for music, and could touch the harp with any wandering

scop who chanced to reach Gilbert's hall. To this talent he added a magnificent voice, full as a bell, clear and pure as that of a young boy, and his step in the dance was light and graceful. These arts were at this time becoming more and more popular as Norman influence spread, and they were of course in great favour with Gilbert's household, for there were many Normans then in the low countries. For the rest, the young Saxon's time was occupied in hunting, with Martin at his heels, the red deer and the various kinds of smaller game then to be found throughout England and Scotland, but the men of Gilbert's house were already too jealous of the handsome Saxon lad to join company with him.

At last an event happened which added a new interest to his life. For a messenger arrived from London bringing Gilbert news that the king had sent him a young heiress as his ward. This was none other than Alftruda. She was of most noble birth, related to the Gospatrics of Northumbria, whose grandmother, wife of Uchtred, was the daughter of King Ethelred Evil-Counsel, and that king's son who perished in early life was Alftruda's grandfather. King Edward, however, did not desire that she should be married to any of the Gospatricssons, the northern families being strong enough as it was, for his liking.

Thus did Alftruda renew her acquaintance with Hereward. At first the little girl, remembering his violence to the Norman page at Westminster, was inclined to be shy and distant, but the slight aversion soon wore off and the English boy and girl became the best of friends.

One day as Hereward was returning from a ride, with Lightfoot trotting behind, they were aware of an unusual tumult in the courtyard of the castle. Screams and shouts could be heard long before they could make

the gateway, and, at intervals, a kind of low rumbling growl, which caused the two to hurry onward as fast as they could. And great the need, for there in a corner of the courtyard was the great white bear, his long snaky neck swinging from side to side as he stood with one paw upon a dead hound and the other hanging loosely in the air. He had broken his chain and cage. From the side rooms and the ladies' bower came shrieks and shouts, while sobs and screams in a well-known voice directed Hereward's horror-stricken gaze to where a little white figure with golden hair strove in vain to gain admittance to the bower, in which some cowardly men had hidden themselves and the door of which they resolutely refused to open.

Springing from his horse, Hereward snatched his blade from its sheath, and with a single shout of "Ha! Mercia!" ran straight at the monster, which was now in the very act of poising itself to spring upon the maiden. The noise caused it to turn, and with a fierce growl it made at Hereward, and rearing on its great hind legs, stretched out its vast paws to enfold him in their iron gripe. Swinging the long sword high above his head, Hereward struck with all his might, straight down on the beast's muzzle. In another second the sword was jerked out of his hand and the huge creature fell with a thud to the earth, its skull cloven in twain.

Hereward stood staring at his work for a few moments. The first of his great deeds was done. By one stroke, delivered with unfaltering eye and all the vigour of hardy youth, he had slain the mighty fairy monster of the north. And he felt at that moment that, like Sigurd, he could have faced Fafnir, the great dragon, and quailed not.

"Oh, how can I thank you?" cried little Alftruda. "I was nearly dead with fear. Oh, the cruel beast;

look, Hereward, at his great teeth and claws. If it had not been for you——" and the sudden relief from fear caused her to cry again. Hereward took her in his arms and kissed the cherub mouth.

"Never mind, little girl," said he, "the great bear will never frighten you or any one else again, unless it be those brave knights and squires of Gilbert within doors." And indeed no one of the doors had yet been opened, so great was the panic that had seized upon the men as well as the women.

Beckoning to Martin to lend a hand, Hereward seized the huge beast. Its enormous weight defied at first their united efforts, but at last they succeeded in dragging it to the nearest door, against which they propped it in an erect position, after which they returned again to the middle of the courtyard.

Alftruda was beginning to get over her fright, and perceiving that there was fun toward, her tears gave way to a radiant smile which was as though the sun had suddenly broken through a cloud of mist. It was ever thus when she smiled that all around seemed bathed in sunshine, and her mirth never failed to communicate itself to others, even to those who but rarely indulged in smiles. Hereward was not of this stern kind, and the witchery of Alftruda did not now fail of its usual effect upon him. He stood as though fascinated, in the peculiar state of glamour which the winsome girl had power to impose upon him even to his latest days.

"Now, little angel," said he, at last, "run and call the knights. Mind you to tell them that all is safe, or they will surely refuse to open unto you."

Alftruda ran laughing to the door and cried: "Come out, good Sir Geoffrey, and you, brave Sir Thomas, and come you out, good madame; the bear has gone. All is

safe ; I am not eaten yet, though you all forgot to take little Alftruda with you."

There was no answer for some time, but low whisperings could be heard within. "For Heaven's sake," said a lady's voice, "go one of you and bring that child here. I do believe she thinks the bear a kind of large dog and fears him not one whit."

It must be remembered that owing to the absence of windows (in those days very rare), the people within knew nothing of what had happened in the courtyard.

"No," answered a voice, "madame, I will not. 'Twas all very well for my lord your husband to knight me, and I fear not living man—but that monster, ugh ! Let Sir Thomas go, he is younger and lustier than I."

"What, sirrah ! " said another voice ; "Geoffrey, thou false caitiff, thou knowest well that I have much property and thou art landless, with naught to care for save thy horse and sword. No, madame, I will not go. Nor man nor devil fear I, by this good blade—but such teeth and claws ! I have no fancy to have my head crunched to a few splinters of bone ! "

"Ha, you cowards ! " cried a fourth voice, "do you fear and refuse to obey my lady's orders. Here, let me come," and a movement was heard.

"Yea, come thou, good Sir Adrian," cried Alftruda, so convulsed with glee that she was hardly able to speak. Hereward and Martin were holding their sides and reeling (in the throes of internal merriment) like drunken men.

The door-handle moved, and then suddenly the voice spake again : "But hearken, I bethink me. This is no ordinary bear, but a relative of the Berserker and barbarian Siward of these parts. The bear is fairy—yea, he is a fairy. Nay, I'll not go for a king's ransom ! I have an old mother dependent upon me." And those listening

heard him beat a retreat amidst the suppressed curses of the other knights.

At this Hereward uttered such a roar of laughter that it might well have been mistaken for the voice of the bear, mixed as it was with a shrill neighing like a horse that Martin persisted in uttering.

The knights, hearing the laughter, concluded that all must now be safe, and they ventured upon a great show of preparing to sally out the instant the door should be flung open. No sooner was this done, however, than the figure of the bear became visible, to the consternation of those in front, who made a hasty movement to escape what they thought to be imminent death.

When this new panic had somewhat subsided, and it was seen that the bear did not move, the knights once more pressed to the open door and into the courtyard, past bruin, whom they now perceived, to their utter chagrin, to be quite harmless.

By this exploit Hereward earned as much envy and jealousy from the men as praise from Gilbert's lady, who repeatedly offered him knighthood from the blade of her lord. This honour he refused, saying that his valour ought to have some further trial.

Days and weeks passed, and pleasant enough were they for young Hereward, the adored of the ladies, who bribed minstrels to make songs of him and then sang them in the hall or taught them to the girls who danced upon the green. His name was in every one's mouth, nay, he could not return at even without hearing some new ballad in his praise, chaunted by some fair girl on the lawn or sung by a stranger minstrel in the hall. But one morning Martin, who always slept on a bed of rushes at Hereward's door, stopped his master as he came forth. "What now, Martin ?" said Hereward, greatly surprised.

"To-morrow Lord Gilbert returns," said the man, with a strange glance.

"What of that, thou man of mystery," asked Hereward. "Stand out of the way, I must forth to meet Alftruda and thou wilt make me late."

For he had been in the habit of meeting that young lady half-way as she returned from bathing in a stream which ran through the woods near the castle. On such occasions, Alftruda's ladies would depart and the two would return together and often arrive at a much later time than was warranted by the distance of the stream from the Gilberts' hall.

"Master," said Martin, "go not to meet Lady Alftruda this morning."

"Why not, curse you!" said Hereward, now very angry.

"Others are in the habit of hunting early," said Martin. "And they must bring down their game ere my Lord Gilbert return."

"And what hunt they?" asked Hereward, beginning to understand.

"A young lion," replied Martin.

"What, mean they treason to me?" asked Hereward. "I saved the life of Geoffrey three days agone. In any case I will go meet Alftruda."

"Ah, well," said Martin, "wear your byrnie, master, for they will make the attempt to-day."

So Hereward, grumbling, attired himself in his ring-mail and went forth, lance in hand, laughing at himself and his precautions, to meet Alftruda.

He found her lying upon a little turf bank nigh to the stream. She looked more like a nymph of Grecian story than a mortal of flesh and blood, so perfect was her face, so graceful her figure.

"I could not move from here," she explained. "The

sun is so warm and the water was so cold. So I thought I would await you here. Come and help me rise."

Hereward advanced and raised the girl from the ground, kissing her as he did so. For they were as two school friends by now, these twain, and neither was ever entirely happy if the other were away..

"Alftruda," said Hereward severely, when they had gone about a quarter of a mile on their homeward journey.

"Yes, what is it?" asked the little maid, demure as a kitten.

"You know," growled the lad, "you've not kissed me this morning. What have I done?"

"Why, nothing," answered Alftruda, "and that's just the reason. I want you to do something for me this morning."

"And will you kiss me then?" asked Hereward, by nature the more anxious as the favour was deferred.

"Why, of course," said the girl. "But there is such a lovely flower just a little way up those rocks to our right and I do wish you would get it for me."

Hereward looked in the direction in which she pointed and saw a kind of convolvulus, of a peculiarly graceful drooping form, hanging from a ledge of rock about fifteen feet above their heads. They were, in fact, about to enter a kind of narrow ravine, an old water-course, which led them to within a few hundred yards of Gilbert's castle. In another instant Hereward had laid down his lance and was scaling the rock with the agility of a cat. Something whistled past him and he heard a scream. As he turned, something struck him sharply just below the shoulder. Looking swiftly round he perceived two men, bows in hand. And as he turned he heard a shout on the cliff above him. He was plainly ambushed and there seemed no escape. But the brave lad never flinched.

Supporting himself in his perilous position with the left hand, he tore from the cliff a great boulder of limestone rock. One of the men had just notched another arrow to his string. As he raised his eye and ran it along the shaft, Hereward's missile struck him full in the face and the lad sprang to the ground. The remaining felon drew his sword, but he was no match for one in whom even travelling fence-masters found their superior. In an instant his blade was whirling around his head and Hereward's keen edge had bitten clean through his shoulder-blade, almost severing the head from the body. The warm blood spurted up full in the faces of Alftruda and the victor.

But what of the cliff? Quick as thought, Hereward took the javelin from the little Saxon maid and stood to the ready, with spear poised against the face of the rock. But there was no movement there. As the young Saxon stood in doubt, a friendly voice was heard.

"Swear not to throw, young master, and I'll show."

The grinning face of Martin Lightfoot looked out for an instant and withdrew into a tuft of grass.

"Come out of that," shouted Hereward. "Eye of Odin, how camest thou there?"

"Where the master is, there should the man be," replied the runner. "I've got him, lord." And he climbed down.

"Whom?" queried Hereward, making his way again up the side of the rock. Pausing to pick the well-won convolvulus, he gained the rock's summit and beheld the senseless form of the knight Geoffrey, whom he had saved, at peril of his own life, from robbers, three days before.

"I found him awaiting you, master; and so struck him with the flat of mine axe. I was sorely tempted to let him have the pick instead," explained Martin.

"'Tis well," said Hereward, "and now let us look to this knave whom I happened to hit with a rock."

"It skills not, master," cried Lightfoot, "the arch fiend he has always served will do that henceforth. Thou hast scattered his brains on the grass." And it was so. The great rock had caught the caitiff full in the centre of the forehead.

"Shall we slay this fellow?" asked Martin.

"Not so," said Hereward. "Do thou run on to the hall and bring a cart. We will not carry him home and 'twill be disgrace enough for him, a knight, to ride home thus."

Martin departed at a run for the hall. Hereward, young barbarian as he was, set his foot on the breast of a fallen foe and cried to Alftruda, "Now my Fairy Strength (punning upon her name Ælfthryth), come thou and pay me for my labour. Here is thy flower, kiss me now, as thou hast said. Lo! I will win thy love and thy kisses 'midst blood of the fallen and groans of the dying, e'en thus!" and he stretched out his hand.

The girl's face was blanched with terror, but she came forward nevertheless and their lips met in a long caress. But ere they parted an untoward event befel. From a cave in the rock issued a lean, bow-backed creature, whose awful countenance, shrivelled with age and evil thought, yet shone with a malevolent fire, as she gazed at the fair young couple.

"Ay, ay," she piped, "thou hast said, thou with Thor's arm and Baldur's face, thou hast spoken the truth. In blood and groans shalt thou win her and grieve that thou didst ever see her and eat thy heart out with sorrow that she e'er crossed thy path, and yet shalt thou be fain of her and long for her kisses to the last. Ay, and I read thee a mighty man of brain and hand;

great deeds shalt thou do and shalt win honour and fame and a name that shall never die. A son of Thor art thou and shalt fight in the ranks of the Gods at Ragnarok. I, Gudrun, Hela's daughter, have spoken. But thou," and she gazed at the fair face of the girl as she spoke, with such an eager, absorbing look that Alftruda shrunk into Hereward's arms, closer and yet closer, " thou, thou, thou, why, fair as thou art, as a star in heaven, thou shalt yet live to love and live to hate and pray to die. Thou shalt wed a man and tire of him ; thou shalt wed a hero and betray him ; thou shalt wed a tyrant upstart and long for the hero whom thou didst betray ; ay, long, long shalt thou yearn and shalt not be satisfied. And thou, the fairest, as thou art, of all creatures that live and move and in whom is the breath of life, thou shalt betray and thou shalt repent. And such a repentance ! Ay, by Hela's soul ! Gaze thou at yon rock face. Such pity as thou seest there shalt thou find to thy repentance. What seest thou there ? Is it water that flows from the rock, or is it blood ? It matters naught, Alftruda, 'tis not the milk of pity. Of pity shalt thou find naught and of pity shalt thou give naught and thou shalt be as the desert traveller that longs for a draught of water though erst his vats brimmed full with the red wine. What is written in the great Book, who may shun ? But thou art for the eyes of many and for the love of many and for the curse of many and for the ruin of him to whom thy soul shall cleave alone. Alone, said I, ay, thou shalt be alone, alone, alone—who more alone ? Gaze, Alftruda of Cerdic's noblest race, gaze thou into yon cavern. Then pray that God, Whoe'er He be, may blast this hour that fatal loveliness of thine. Better were it for thee that those fair white limbs were white with leprosy,

"Thou shalt live to love, and live to hate, and pray to die"

that that fair young face were even now coarse and old, those starry eyes as dull as stones, that rosebud mouth parched as a withered leaf, those thick golden locks threadbare and grey. I have spoken."

And the wild figure disappeared as she had come and neither lad nor girl had found space to speak. Alftruda was shaking as with a deadly chill in the youth's arms, in every vein she trembled. But Hereward, not so. He only cried: "Be it so, though an eternity of Hela's realms were the price, thou shouldst be mine, ay, could the worst thing of the worst that a fiend might contrive be my fate, thou art here and I am here. And for such evil crows, bah! who shall heed such?"

And they embraced again, and were more to each other than earthly wealth, than kingship or eternal fate, than thought or fear. For they were young and lovers, and surely it was well.

And thus did Martin find them and thus did they reach the hall, dazed and wondering indeed, but all in all to each other.

The next morning, Hereward, to the joy of the men and the grief of the ladies, announced his fixed resolve to set forth again upon his adventures.

"Thou, dearest lady," said he to Lady Ghent, "hast promised me knighthood and adoption should I remain. But knighthood I hope to win by far greater deeds than bear-slaying and, for adoption, I have neither relatives nor need of any. My sword is my only friend. And so farewell, dear lady. Heaven save thee and thy lord! And to thee, my Pride of Fairies"—to Alftruda—"fare thee well until we meet again. See to it that thou forget not Hereward ere that day. A kiss, and so farewell!"

CHAPTER VII

ROMANTIC WORK IN CORNWALL

Thy sword is to keep thine honour white,
And thine honour must keep thy good sword bright,
And both must be free from stain.

HEREWARD made his way again to Whitby and there took ship with certain merchants who had a cargo of wine for Cornwall. They informed him that their freight was for a Cornish kinglet, Alef by name. Hereward, to whom Cornwall was a land of enormous giants, dragons and wizards, for many a story had he heard old men tell of that strange land of Welisce men, thought that he might find in the West Country some chance of winning fresh fame at the expense of these monsters. After several days' sail, the mariners made their way up a tide river that flowed away inland beneath a beautiful roof of foliage and came in sight of Alef's hamlet. It consisted of a clump of huts of a grey stone, surrounding a very long building of granite with high walls, in which Alef himself dwelt with his family. The traders found him about to commence the midday meal. The king himself, an old man of huge stature, had his seat on a low daïs at the upper end of the hall. In youth he must have been a perfect giant in strength as his vast limbs, though now shrunken, still bore witness. Along each side of a long board, supported on trestles, sat his chief soldiers. Cornishmen

and Danes, great and fierce-looking men with keen hawk-eyes that seemed ever on the watch for plunder. The fire of pine logs in the centre of the hall sent its smoke through a hole in the roof, and at another long table opposite sat the house-ceorls and other fighting men. The merchants were well known and took their places on the second bench. Hereward sat down with them, looking gallant and conspicuous enough in his Saxon costume, covered by a fine bearskin cloak.

Presently Alef called to the merchants and inquired if they had brought him a good cargo of wine.

The chief merchant arose and crossed the hall.

"Yea, King Alef," said he, "we have much both of France and Spain, very good vintages."

"'Tis well," said Alef, "then will we buy it from you with tin from our newly opened mine. See thou to it, Thorbiorn."

"And who is that young stranger ye have there, friend?" resumed Alef. "From his looks I should judge him a Saxon ætheling rather than a trader."

"I know naught of him, lord," answered the merchant. "He came aboard with his long-nosed serf at Whitby. 'Tis likely enough he is well-born."

"I'll warrant him for that, thou old fox," laughed Alef. "Better than thou, at least. Call him hither."

"I can answer for myself, king," cried Hereward, rising. "I am earl-born, and come hither in search of adventure. I can fight well for thee if thou hast need. If not, Midgard is wide and I will leave thee in peace. Skall to King Alef!" He emptied a horn of ale as he spoke.

"Skall to thee," quoth the king, imitating his example. "Come thou up hither, my fine bird, and let us have further speech. I like thy bearing and thine answer."

Hereward rose to obey, but at that moment a hush seemed to come over the hall which, a moment before, had been filled with the sounds of merriment usually attendant on such feasts. The young Saxon paused and, glancing about him, followed the eyes of the revellers towards the door. There he beheld two newcomers, as strangely assorted a couple as could be imagined. A mighty man, the biggest he had ever seen, with black hair and prominent features, small cruel eyes and thin lips, in height between seven and eight feet, was striding up the hall. At his side, her fingers resting on his arm, was a beautiful dark-haired girl, with great deep blue eyes, full of fear. Her face was of the Irish type, oval and delicate, the mouth and nose might have done honour to a statue of Artemis. A murmur went through the room, and all, save the king, rose, crying, " Skall to our princess, skall ! Skall to our mighty champion ! "

The two went on to the upper bench, where space next the king was reserved. Hereward stared hard at the great man as he passed, then again at the girl, and it seemed to him that here was work to be done. For the terror in the maiden's eyes was plain enough. The pair took their seats and Hereward moved to a place opposite the king.

This brought him face to face with all three, but King Alef seemed to have lost interest in him. Instead he was deep in converse with the gigantic newcomer. The girl did not join in speech with the men, but Hereward observed that she shuddered from time to time as remarks reached her ear. The speeches became more and more heated, and fragments of the talk were caught by Hereward.

" I tell thee no," Alef was saying, " it cannot be as yet. The girl is at her book-learning with the priest

and therefore the time does not serve for mating. 'Twere a shame to cut her studies short."

The other answered with an oath.

"Time seems to serve thee but not me, King Alef," he growled. "Seven years I have fought for thee and chiefs of thy foes as many have I slain, but I get no nearer to my reward. I'll leave this land to-morrow an she weds me not then."

"No," answered the king, "thou must not go, Iron Sore, thou art too useful to mine old age. Content thee to wait a while for Margaret. So shalt thou have her with my blessing."

"And when?" cried the giant-man, with growing violence.

"Before Yuletide," answered the king. "I swear it by my sword!"

"And I swear by mine," roared the giant, "that if Margaret weds me not to-morrow, I leave thy town. And more, I will league myself with Ivar thy foe, and we shall see whether I cannot win my bride after another manner, since she cannot be won in friendly wise."

Hereward saw a troubled look pass over the king's face. He replied in a lower tone to the great warrior and they continued their talk in whispers.

Hereward heard no more, but in a few minutes' time he judged, by the faces of the two, that Iron Sore had gained his way. A self-complacent smile had taken the place of his angry scowl, while the king applied himself with resigned air more closely to the mead. As for the girl, her attitude betokened suffering, and her glance, as it rested for a moment on the young Saxon, expressed utter hopelessness.

Presently Alef called to his scop and the bard chanted a rough sea song that earned thunders of applause and

two or three handsome gifts from the wavefaring chiefs there gathered. But Hereward, to serve his own designs, rudely laughed, thereby drawing upon him the attention of all who were sober enough to heed aught.

"By Ægir! king," roared he, "a man must laugh when he hears a crow cawing. I could earn this fellow's wages six times o'er should it please thee to try mine art."

The king could not forbear to smile at the boast words of the lad, and he ordered that the harp should be handed to Hereward.

"Fulfil thy boast!" quoth he.

Hereward took the harp and a deep silence fell upon the rude gathering as he rose. He sang of a fair damsel, whose friends being too weak to protect her, a huge and hideous giant sought to carry her off with intent to make her his bride. But a brave young champion, a guest at her father's court, thwarted the monster's purpose, for, contending with him in single strife, he slew him and set the lady free to follow her will. And he sang with such freshness and ardour, with such conviction and in such a clear, youthful voice, that the ears and hearts of his rough audience were altogether charmed, and though there were not wanting those who guessed his drift, as indeed he had schemed, the deafening clamour that greeted his lay left no doubt as to the impression his singing had made. The king reached him his own gold arm-ring, while the princess gave him a quick glance of hope and gratitude from beneath her long dark lashes. This did not escape even the dull wits of Iron Sore, who by this time had become quarrelsome with the sweet mead he had quaffed in copious quantities, and rising threateningly he said:

"We plain-speaking men need no such fine mincing cockerels as thou! Methinks a buffet or two would bring

thee to a meeker frame of mind." And, leaning over the bench, he muttered, "Thou shalt die by mine hand ere the world be a week older."

Hereward laughed and, answering in the same half-whisper, said, "Who may avoid his fate? Forbear all advantage to one so unskilled in weapons as I, and fight fairly. Thus shall thy triumph be the more glorious."

"Englishmen," roared the Pict, for such he was, "of what worth are they in battle? I never yet met one with more strength than a good-sized Gaelic boy. Why thou art but a boy too, and I have ere this killed three men of your land with one stroke!"

Hereward remained cool but menacing. "Ay," said he, "I doubt not but the wind from your weapon blew three more away and six others fell to your back-handed stroke. But of a truth, these three were born of no mother save thine own heart and were slain of no hand but of thine own mouth."

At these words, says the old chronicler, the daughter of the king "was dissolved in laughter," and she fell to praising Hereward's fair face and golden curls. No surer way to incense the giant could possibly have been taken.

"An 'twere not that the lord is here," shouted Iron Sore, "I would slay thee here and now. Ah, would that even now I stood face to face with thee!"

"Fear not, thou shalt stand face to face with me," answered Hereward in a low, ominous tone, "thou wilt not be the first. But it shall be to us then as Wyrd shall decide. She is the ruler of the fates of men."

So spake he, almost in the very words of the great poem on which in his boyhood at Bourne he had daily fed.

"We will have no fighting here," interposed King Alef. "Thou, Iron Sore, must refrain from insulting our guest,

and do thou, young Englishman, be less ready with thy sword." He lowered his voice, seeing that the Pict was speaking with his daughter, and said in Hereward's ear:

"Fight not with him, whoe'er thou beest; to stand against him is certain death. He is the greatest warrior in all the tribes of the Picts and Scots."

"Yet may it well be that England might show his match. Howbeit, rest assured, king, that I will not seek the feud," answered Hereward, confident as ever in himself, and confident, moreover, that he would not need to seek out the Pict.

And thus it befel. For wandering unarmed the next morning in a grove near the hamlet, Hereward met the giant attired in mail shirt and helmet and armed with an iron grapple.

"Ha!" said the Pict, "lo! now the time is come to present that hair of thine to her that loves it so. With sorrow shall she be shaken, rather than with laughter. Thou art the puny stripling that dared defy Iron Sore, a killer of kings before thou wert born. Come now, for death awaits thee and short shall be thy shrift."

"There is little glory," answered Hereward, "for a man of thy renown, armed, to crush the helpless. Do thou but allow me to return, to arm myself and give the few pence that I have to the priest that he may bestow them upon the poor. Then within an hour will I return to fight with thee until Wyrd, disposer of the fates of men, grant the victory-joy to thee or to me. Meanwhile say naught to any one."

The giant laughed loud and long.

"So be it," he cried, "Get thee away, arm thyself and return, for an thou comest not back I will slay thee at sight, ay, even in hall. Fear not, I swear by Fenrir,

I bring not odds against a boy, but will await thee here."

Hereward quickly departed, joy in his heart, and first securing his weapons, he then sought Alef's priest, to whom he gave his purse, bidding him bestow it upon the poor that they might pray for his soul should he fall in the fight.

The quick eye of Martin, ever on the watch, had seen these movements of his young master, and guessing what was toward, he silently followed, and ensconced himself behind a furze-bush, vowing direful vengeance on the Pict should he slay (as indeed the poor serf thought 'twould be likely) his young master. So there he remained, his fingers nervously clasping and unclasping upon the haft of his little axe.

Meanwhile Hereward, his fearless nature permitting no misgiving, entered the brake, brandishing an ash-spear.

No time was wasted in parleying, the giant rushed forward with a dreadful cry and aimed such a mighty stroke with his long grapple that Hereward was fain to spring aside. The force of the stroke drove the weapon deep into the turf, and even as the Pict braced himself to recover it, the stout ash-lance had been driven, sharp and clean, into his thigh. Turning with an oath, the great man snapped the shaft, leaving at least a foot of it embedded in his leg.

The issue now depended solely upon Hereward's ability to avoid the mighty blows of the Pict. When but sixteen years of age, the Mercian lad had been the equal of any travelling master of fence throughout England, and his sword-skill stood him in right good stead. Wounded as he was, the giant could only make irregular attacks and these Hereward easily avoided by stepping

to one side, ever as he stepped inflicting some wound upon the vast body of his antagonist. These tactics at last goaded the gigantic Pict to such a degree of rage and impatience that suddenly swinging his great weapon he aimed so swift a stroke that the lad had time to do naught save to interpose his shield. The weapon of the Pict fell with mighty force and, glancing from the shield, its keen point drove through the byrnie and pierced Hereward's shoulder, causing him to drop his shield. At this the giant gave a cry of triumph, but as he drew the lad towards him, Hereward thrust at his unguarded side. Clean through a neglected rent in the mail shirt went the keen blade and the Pict rolled upon the ground, drenched in blood.

"Ah," groaned he," that I should fall by the stripling hand of a crafty boy!" And muttering curses on the Norns who had brought him to this pass his spirit fled to its proper place.

Even as his enemy fell, Hereward had heard a clamour of men hasting to the scene and now from the trees burst a number of armed warriors, mostly Picts and Ost-Danes, with Alef at their head. All save the king drew their swords and moved threateningly towards Hereward, who stood with one foot upon the prostrate corpse of his foe, the incarnation of War's savage joy and Conquest's pride. A moment later, Martin sprang from the bushes and placed himself by his master's side, but ere a blow was struck, Alef cried in a great voice:

"Sheathe your blades, there shall be no murder here. I am lord and will see the right done."

"Foul play!" cried the Picts, "he was slain by sorcery no mortal man could have killed him in fair combat! Never! 'Tis craft and black art!"

"I tell ye," cried Alef, "fair trial shall there be. But do not ye dare to strike here! I swear that I will reckon

him my foe for life that gives the first stroke! Seize and guard the strangers, Ost-Danes!"

The Danes, who naturally cared far less for the fallen man that did his own countrymen, the Picts, and who, moreover, admired Hereward's prowess and many Scandinavian traits of character, at length fell in around the young Saxon and thus Alef at last, with much difficulty, got him to the hamlet and confined him and Martin in a large stone hut, near the hall.

Martin at once proceeded to dress the slight wounds his lord had received in the combat. And shortly after Hereward sank into a heavy sleep.

About midnight Martin, ever on the watch, heard a quiet step without their door. He sprang to his feet at once and stood with axe raised, ready to brain the first comer. But the light of their single cresset fell upon the grey hairs of Alef's old priest, who, beholding the axe, gave a great start and dropped a huge key. As he did so, a man sprang from the darkness but, ere Martin's axe could descend, the fellow turned and fled swiftly into the night. Martin seized the key.

"Now, sir priest," quoth he, "get thee gone and quickly."

"Nay," said the priest, "thou must smite, my son, but smite gently and then flee with thy master. I must appear as if stunned."

Quickly did Martin's keen brain seize upon the intent of his words and, tapping the priest upon the head, he ran to Hereward, who was groping for his sword.

"Quick, lord," said Martin, "the door is open, they offer us escape."

But few minutes elapsed ere they had scaled the great mounds and were making their way with all speed to the river-bank, where lay the merchants. Suddenly

Hereward started and seized Martin's arm in a vice-like grip.

"See there, Lightfoot," he cried. "Surely 'tis some fairy or troll. We are fey."

Following the direction of his lord's outstretched hand Martin saw a strange sight. The form of a maiden, clothed in white, had arisen in the centre of a small copse of pine-trees. Her raised arm seemed to be directed towards them and she appeared to be beckoning them. Martin stared for a moment and then gave one of his chuckling laughs.

"Master," said he, "the spirit is a friendly one. See, it is that of the king's daughter!"

It was indeed Margaret, who now advanced to meet them, the moonlight flashing red on the gold tiara set in her dark locks.

"See," she cried, "I have set you free. I would dare all for him who has staked his life for me. What is your name, young lord?"

"I am called Hereward Leofricsson."

"The son of the great Earl of Mercia," said the girl. "Your name is well known even in this wild country. Now, Hereward, will you befriend a helpless maiden once more?"

"Yea," said the lad, "and thrice yea. An the working of thy will but stand within the power of a man, I am pledged thereto."

"Then do this. Go to Waterford to Prince Sigtryg, my betrothed. Tell him your adventure here. Let him know how nearly he has lost me. Bid him be mindful of me, for of a verity I am hard pressed here."

"That will I surely do, lady," answered Hereward.

From a bush close at hand the princess drew forth a tremendous sword, the broad steel flashing blue in the

"Carry my message to Sigtryg, my love" 110

moonlight. The hilt was ivory, the weapon such as Beowulf himself might have wielded in his perilous fight with the mere-wife on the sea-cave's sandy floor.

"Take this," she cried. "'Tis the ogre's mighty sword which I hid, fearing for you. It has magical power. Whoso smites with it must slay his foe. Yours be the honour and glory for ever. Take also these rings and coins that you may pay the merchants for your passage, and carry my message to Sigtryg, my love, across the seas."

As the princess spoke, she thrust several beautiful gold and silver ornaments into Hereward's hands.

"Trust me, lady," said he. "I shall obey you in this fair behest. Would only that I had Sigtryg's fortune!"

"Indeed I do trust you, Hereward," replied Margaret; "but I am betrothed to the prince. Were it not for that— But what am I saying? Go now, do my bidding."

Hereward knelt and kissed her hand, then, rising, he bowed lowly and, a few moments later, he and Martin had reached the strand. Clambering up the side of the vessel which had brought them, Hereward bribed the merchants to sail at once. Thus did he leave Cornwall on the service of Margaret, Alef's daughter.

CHAPTER VIII

TIDINGS AND A VOW

Each man at his brother's bidding to come with the blade in his hand,
Though the fire and the flood should sunder, and the very Gods withstand;
Each man to love and cherish his brother's hope and will;
Each man to avenge his brother when the Norns his fate fulfil.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

SO Hereward made his way to Waterford to find Sigtryg. This prince was the son of King Ranald Sigtrygsson of Waterford, one of the Ost-Danish chieftains then well settled in Ireland.

Hereward found the king occupied in much the same way as Alef had been, that is to say, in feasting in his hall, the arrangement whereof was also similar to that of the hall of the Cornish kinglet. Two long benches were set along the walls of the room on either side of the fire which, heaped with giant logs, sent its smoke through an opening in the roof.

Hereward, as before, sat down on the hindmost bench. Glancing around he perceived a handsome well-built young man sitting at the king's right hand, and thinking that this must be Sigtryg, he tried to attract his attention in various ways. After regarding him for several minutes he suddenly remembered his face. Where had he seen it? Ah! a sudden light dawned upon him and he recalled the Viking boat at Boston and his own capture. This, then, was that Sigtryg who had dealt so kindly

with himself and Leofric, two boys of twelve years. Hereward remembered that he had vowed to repay the good deed. And he would do it! Surely the Norns had ordained that they should meet once more. At last he caught Sigtryg's eye and promptly raised his cup.

"Who is that young stranger, father?" asked the prince. "He looks more like a jarl's son than a ceorl and should surely be here with us rather than among the freemen."

"Yea, of a surety," replied King Ranald. "Go, my son, ask him his name and bid him up hither to drink with us."

The Prince Sigtryg, a tall and noble-looking youth, walked slowly towards Hereward's seat. Hereward gazed at him with much interest and could not but think how suitable a match he would make for the lovely Cornish maiden. Indeed, a slight pang of jealousy smote him. For he was ever extremely vain and somewhat selfish.

"Who art thou, young lord?" asked Sigtryg.

"A landless man, prince," replied Hereward, gazing fixedly at him. A troubled look crossed Sigtryg's handsome face as he strove to call to mind where he had seen Hereward before.

"Skall to thee, prince!" cried Hereward, quaffing a horn of ale.

"Skall!" replied Sigtryg, and as they clinked the horns the Saxon raised his arm so that Sigtryg could see a slight gold bracelet with the Danish raven thereon engraved. The young Dane gave a great start and a flush overspread his face, but Hereward whispered, "Not now; hereafter I would have speech with thee."

"Come, then, with me to the upper bench," said Sigtryg. As Hereward was about to take his seat, two

young men, sitting near Ranald, rose and gravely saluted him. As he responded he knew them for the sons of his sister who had married Asbiorn, son of Earl Siward. Siward the White and Siward the Red.

"Well, what spell from England, nephews?" asked Hereward.

"Evil spell, Hereward," answered the taller of the two, Siward the White. "Alfgar, your brother, is outlawed again, after King Edward had confirmed him in the earldom. He is here now, in Dublin, trying to get ships for a raid on England."

"And the Godwinssons outlawed him, of course?" queried Hereward.

"Yes, yes, just as before," cried both the lads. "He had but just come into the earldom——"

"What earldom?" asked Hereward.

He read his answer in their faces and was himself too overcome for a minute or so to speak further.

"You would say Mercia?" said he at length. "My lord Leofric, then, sleeps with his fathers."

A gloomy silence answered him and he stood there for some while, crushing down the sorrow that would rise in his breast.

"Earl Siward dead and my father also. God rest their souls!" were the only words he was heard to say.

The king's scald now began to chaunt a lay in praise of King Ranald. After, as the custom was, he passed his harp round among the guests.

Hereward took it and, rising, sang thus—

"Hear thee, thou high king,
Lord and lawgiver,
Great-hearted granter
Of gay golden rings;
Wandering wolf's-head,
Outcast and outlaw,

Lonely lonegoer,
Walk I the wide ways,
Feckless and friendless,
Save for my sharp sword,
Stout shield and long spear,
Head-warding helm.
Whiles in the winsome
Ways of the woodland,
Meads of fair Mercia,
Marching I trode,
High-handed earl's son,
Lad of Lord Leofric.
Strove I with strangers,
New Norman folk,
Roughly I wrestled,
Fiercely in fight,
Brake their bone-coffers,
Lifeless I left them.
Outlawed by Edward,
Far from the fenland,
Fought I the fairy-
Bear of Bernicia,
Boldly I cleft him.
Coming to Cornwall
Knew I a kind king,
Dark-haired his daughter,
Lovely as lily;
Ogre, the uncouth,
Loathliest leman
Slew I to save her;
Soon did she send me,
Bearing bright token,
Trusting her troth-plight
To Hereward's hand;
Bidding me bear it
Thence to her true love
Over the auk's bath,
Careful to charge him
Soon her to help,
Lest he should lose her
Once and for all,
Lady friend-lacking
Loth left I there;
May I soon meet him
Hope of her heart!"

During this lay, which was greeted with lasting applause by all for its ready alliteration, a literary ornament much in vogue among the old Teutonic races, Sigtryg could hardly contain himself. The king was lavish in words of praise for Hereward's poetry, and handed him a bracelet of fine gold in reward for his song. Hereward placed it on his arm and, raising his goblet, cried:

"I give thee the old Saxon greeting, Waes hael! Ring-giver."

As he drank he stretched his arm towards Sigtryg as if to show him the king's gift and, at the same time, skilfully detached Margaret's bracelet, letting it fall into the prince's hand. So cleverly did he this that none there observed that it was not the king's arm-ring that Sigtryg appeared to be so intently admiring.

After this the men drank a great deal of ale, as was the wont of the Ost-Danes.

Hereward fell to talking and drinking with the Siwards and had little difficulty in persuading them to follow his sword.

"Ay, we will come, chief, our swords are yours!" cried the boys.

"Now are you already men," quoth Hereward. And he added to himself: "Methought they would come."

When all had gone Hereward sat long with Sigtryg, calling to mind the circumstances under which they had previously met, and then telling him the news from Cornwall. He repeated the message of Margaret and at the close Sigtryg rose and solemnly embraced him.

"I owe you my life and my happiness," said he; "for you have saved them in saving my Love. May I be held niddering amongst men while I live, may Hela's realms possess my soul when I die, if I fail when the time shall

"As my blood-brother shalt thou be" 116

offer, to serve you in like wise. By Odin I swear it, by the God of the Christians do I swear it. As my blood-brother shalt thou be to me for aye."

The two men then discussed their plan of campaign. They settled to depart on the morrow for Cornwall and to demand the maiden from King Alef. In any case they would take her even against his will. And as for other suitors, they swore hard and often that it should go in evil wise with any such.

Then went those two forth and walked long together until they came to a meadow hard by the sea and there cutting a strip of the sward they loosened it in the midst and placed the midmost portion beneath two ash-spears set opposite. Thus had they a door whose threshold and lintel were alike of the earth. Then went they both with drawn blades beneath the yoke of earth and opened each a vein of his arm so that the blood fell and mingled upon the earthen floor. Then each warrior knelt down with his hands upon the blood and took the solemn oath of brotherhood. That each should come, sword in hand, at the call of his brother whate'er should bar the way, ay, even should the gods forbid; that each should love and will that which his brother should love and will. And thus swore the young Saxon and the young Dane, now blood-brethren, according to the most ancient custom of the Goths of the days of eld when the world was yet young.

Early the next morning they were to be seen on the shore, making ready their force for Cornwall. But when, sped by a fair wind, they were safely landed, a dire spell met them in the form of a missive from Margaret which ran:

"Margaret, daughter of Alef, to Sigtryg Ranaldsson, Prince of Waterford.—Greeting.

" Alas, how could I have ever dreamed that you would deceive a simple girl ? Why are you so unmindful of your troth-plight ? My father is compelling me to mate with the savage barbarian Haco, while it is you only that I love. Will you never bestir yourself, you that are so active and zealous in other matters. Take care, I pray you, that your fame suffer not a sore reproach. But an you are indeed aweary of me, be mindful at least of this, that I am ever true to you and also of those former dealings between us."

Nearly beside himself with anxiety, Sigtryg showed Hereward the parchment. Then, gathering a band of forty Danes, he sent them forward under two leaders, bidding Alef redeem his plighted word. If the king refused to listen Sigtryg charged his chiefs to say that he would attack him and Haco and carry off the princess by force of arms.

But Hereward was uneasy. Swift action was needed. With Martin and the two Siwards he stole out of the camp, dyed his fine yellow hair black and disguised Martin as best he could. That night they were guests at Haco's bridal feast and learned all his plans. The forty Danes had been seized and were to be blinded on the morrow before release at a certain place on Haco's line of march, where a rapid river, in its course through a great ravine or cleft in the cliffs, formed a territorial mark.

All this Hereward learnt from Margaret herself, who with her nurse alone knew him in his disguise. She managed to present him, as fee-gift for some beautiful singing, now by himself, now with the two young Siwards—a triple glee in the manner of the Girvii, that ancient British tribe of the fen country—with a fine ermine cloak in the lining whereof was a ring, the sign to Sigtryg, and a

parchment which showed the line of the Cornishman's march.

That night the four Englishmen left the hall under cover of darkness and laid an ambush on the further side of the ravine. When the bridal party hove in sight, Hereward whispered to his men, "Let the Danes cross with their guards and as soon as ever you see me slay my man fall on the Cornish, and for each man ye slay, release his prisoner. Thus only may we overcome them."

As Haco, exulting in the capture of the fair bride who rode beside him, came gaily prancing across the ford there was a downward rush from above. Some one sprang into the stream and Haco's last sight upon earth was that of a little thick-set man with a shock of black hair and a heavy spear quivering in his right hand. The tyrant knew no more, for the next instant the weapon was projecting a handbreadth behind his back. Three more fell to the Siwards and Martin, who cut the bonds of the Danes and bade them seize the weapons of the fallen. It was desperate work, however, when the Cornish began to recover from their surprise, for the hands of the Danes were stiff from a night passed in bonds. But the Cornish were disheartened at the loss of their leader and the valour of Hereward decided the day. Having led the princess from the press, he hurled himself like a lion into the fight again, and hewing right and left, cut his way far into the heart of the foe.

"He is baresark," they cried. "He is the devil!" and a panic seized them.

The number of Danes continually increased, and but one or two of the Cornishmen got back across the river to tell Alef what manner of merry-making had followed his daughter's bridal feast.

"You have saved me once more, brave Hereward, May the Ruler of Heaven bless and reward you. I know not how I may."

Thus whispered Margaret as she leant from her horse and girl-like frankly kissed her young champion.

But Hereward's horses and men were nigh all tired out, and it was midnight ere they joined forces with Sigtryg, who fell on Hereward's neck and the young men embraced in silence.

It was a merry company that set sail for Waterford at dawn.

Happy were the two young lovers and scarcely less so was Hereward himself. For his was the joy that ever comes to him who, without self-seeking, works the welfare of others.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE LILY OF PROVENCE

The shattering trumpet shrilleth high
The hard brands shiver on the steel,
The splinter'd spear-shafts crack and fly,
The horse and rider reel.
They reel, they roll in clanging lists.
And when the tide of combat stands,
Perfume and flowers fall in showers,
That lightly rain from ladies' hands.

TENNYSON, "Sir Galahad."

RIGHT glad was King Ranald when his son, leading his fair bride by the hand, set foot in safety on the beach at Waterford. A royal welcome he gave them and splendid was the bridal feast that followed. The young Siwards and Martin received rich gifts thereat and, as for Hereward, the old king took such a liking to him that he made little difference between his own son Sigtryg and the brave young Englishman. For his friend's feats lost nothing when Sigtryg related them, and the name of Hereward Leofricsson was soon known far and wide as the most likely young champion of the day. Ranald's scops made songs about him, Vikings sang them, and merchants, in those days very often fighting men themselves, carried tidings of his great deeds to the distant ports with which they traded. Many a troublesome neighbour of King Ranald did the fierce young Saxon, as wary as he was brave, help to harry or subdue.

There came a time when a great longing possessed him to see once more the broad reedclad meres, the emerald pastures and boundless skies of his native Anglia. Nor could King Ranald's grief at the thought of losing his son's friend, nor his offer of one of his grand-daughters to wife, with a rich grant of land, in any way dissuade Hereward. He asked and obtained two long dragon-prowed ships, fitted with arms and crew and, taking a warm leave of the old king, and of Sigtryg, his brother-in-arms, and the fair wife he had risked so much to win for him, he set sail on a day from Waterford.

But things went not well with the voyage. The young men were driven ashore on the Orkneys and there lost a ship. Thence a hurricane blew them out to sea again and they endured great toil and misery during the cold stormy nights ; also they lost several of the crew. But ever Hereward kept up the hearts of his men by his own cheerfulness, now singing a gay sea-song when they seemed gloomy, now aiding, with his own hand, the lowest among them in some hard task on deck or beneath.

So, after undergoing the worst of weathers, the rain incessantly hissing on the decks, the thunder crashing above and around them and the jagged lightning cleaving the sky on all sides, the mountain waves sweeping around and often clean over them, they sighted one morning to leeward a long low shore, on to which they were drifting rapidly. It was impossible to avoid the land and Hereward, calling the men on deck, bade them get their weapons ready for any emergency.

And none too soon. For when the ship, driven by the full force of the rowers, bounded on the beach, a crowd of peasants surrounded it, menacing the crew with hostile gestures.

Hereward ordered his men to refrain from any sign

of enmity and contented himself with the display of his armed following, their double axes and chain mail producing a kind of panic among the peasants, who had expected an easy prey, taking the ship for the craft of some merchant.

Presently there rode up a stately knight with half a dozen men-at-arms :

" Who art thou," he queried in Norman French, " who bringest thy ship hither to land so recklessly ? Without doubt, thou art some spy, the forerunner of a hostile band ; thou art come to see the nakedness of the land."

" I am no spy, sir knight," answered Hereward, " nor an enemy to you unless you will it so. My name is Harald Lourikson, England my country, warfare my need. If therefore you have want of men, receive us in friendly wise and we will fight your battles for you. If you still look on us as foes, we shall each give some trouble ere we be slain."

The count, considering the number, equipment and hardy appearance of the strangers, thought this likely, so after conferring with his followers awhile, he told Hereward that he might land his men, but that they must regard themselves as the honourable captives of Baldwin, Count of Flanders.

Whereat they all landed and were led into St. Omer there to await Baldwin's commands. Although not without misgivings as to the character of his guests, the anxiety of the worthy count was somewhat lessened by the excellent French spoken by Hereward. " No barbarian," reflected the count, " could be half so learned in the language of chivalry."

Hereward was provided with a horse and as he rode at the head of his men into St. Omer, the Flemish knights on either side, the gentlefolk and townspeople of the

place flocked to see them. For it was a rare thing, indeed, for such a large body of armed foreigners to enter any town ruled by the potent Baldwin the Debonair. The Danes marched stolidly on, but Hereward, ever watchful to learn what he might of strange places and strange men, flashed his piercing gaze around him as he rode. The townsfolk with staring eyes and mouths wide open gaped upon him as he passed. But these were not the only inhabitants of the old city who were interested in the strangers, for half the nobility were watching from their houses. Through the gable window of one of the best of these, Hereward saw a lovely girl with raven-black tresses, regarding him intently. He saw her and no more for the moment. He knew, however, that she perceived him glance in her direction by the flash of her deep blue eyes as she disappeared.

Now at this time one of those petty wars, so common while the system of feudalism from which they arose endured in Europe, was raging between the Count of Flanders and his turbulent vassal the Count of Guisnes. Regularly, day by day, the knights of Baldwin rode up to the castle of the rebellious foe, who sallied out to meet them and an interminable series of single combats always ensued, which, as a rule, resulted in breaking of many lances and clashing of swords, but in very little real damage to either side.

Now Hereward had not been in the city many days ere he grew impatient of these feeble tactics, so he obtained permission from the Count of St. Omer to lead his men into the field.

It was not long ere an opportunity for showing his prowess in the combat presented itself. Perceiving a knight, unhorsed by one of the foe, in great danger, Hereward rode to his aid and was fiercely attacked by the

knight's opponent. Three other knights, perceiving an intended rescue, rode up at full speed, and the Saxon was speedily enveloped in a blaze of ring armour and lances. The men of the Count of St. Omer looked to see both taken. But not so did it befal. For Hereward brought the wounded knight safely back to his friends, leaving those four knights dead beneath the castle walls. By this deed he won great repute with the count and his forces, and was accounted distinguished even among their most valiant men.

The Count of Guisnes continuing defiant, the fighting went on day by day before his castle walls. But one morning a severe reverse befel the turbulent vassal, for his grandson, a knight named Hoibricht, of great stature and strength, the most courageous amongst his following, and skilled in every kind of warfare, encountered Hereward apart from his followers. Perceiving one who had wrought great mischief to the cause of his grandfather, Hoibricht, with a cry of, "Have at you, barbarian," rode at Hereward at a great speed. Hereward drave in the spurs and the two men crashed together like thunderbolts. Each struck the centre of his opponent's shield fairly, whereat the spears were shivered to their very hands and both champions rolled over twice or thrice in the dust. Amid courtly applause from the onlookers, each man sprang quickly to his feet and drew his sword. Then ensued a great fight, hand to hand and foot to foot. The shining sparks flew from the blue steel as they fly flashing from the blacksmith's anvil on a frosty day, and so mighty were the strokes that, as if by common consent, all others ceased their combats and drew near to witness the splendid struggle. Finally Hereward dealt his foe an astounding blow beneath the ear, which stretched him senseless on the sward. Quietly picking

up the unconscious knight, Hereward started to carry him towards the ranks of his St. Omer friends. Long before he could regain them, however, the warrior awoke and began to struggle desperately. Natheless, he could in nowise free himself from the strong arms encircling him, and Hereward unaided bore him captive to the shouting Danes.

As soon as he came to know the lineage and importance of the defeated knight, Hereward sent him to the camp to await the ransom, which arrived full speedily, for the very next day, as says the chronicler, the Count of Guisnes, sorely grieved and alarmed at the loss of his grandson, sent it, with besides, "due honour and service to his prince, and also presents and hostages."

In consequence of these achievements the Count of St. Omer reported to his overlord, Baldwin, that the stranger was a doughty knight, well accomplished in warfare and as courteous as brave. Whereupon Baldwin, who knew, none better, that several Englishmen of noble family were exiles on the continent, sent far and wide to inquire of foreigners and merchants as to who such a man could be. Then he returned word that the newcomer, Harald, should be sent, with his following, to Bruges.

As they passed through the crowd of retainers and court ladies Hereward again caught a glimpse of that fair vision he had seen once before in St. Omer.

Once before? Nay, rather many times, asleep and awake had he seen that face, in the stately houses of those who had received him in St. Omer, by camp fire when the hostile forces were face to face, ay, even in the field when striking at the foe. It had, indeed, been ever present to his mind's eye.

Baldwin broke in upon his meditations, informing Hereward that he had caused inquiries to be made about

him and, having found one of those men whom the Saxon had left at the Orkneys, had learnt his real name and dignity. Leofric had been a warm friend of Baldwin and the count welcomed Hereward as a son.

Baldwin, prudent prince as he was, well knew how changeable is the world wherein we live. Hereward was an outlaw and a wolf's-head to-day, to-morrow he might be Earl of Mercia and one of the greatest men in England. So Baldwin received him as he afterwards received Elfgiva Emma, wife of Ethelred Evil Counsel and after of Knut the Great, Sweyn and Tostig Godwinsson, the Countess Githa and almost every great noble outlawed in those turbulent times.

Robert also took greatly to Hereward and before they parted Hereward had agreed to go with him to a new war with the Zeelanders to whom the count had appointed his son as overlord. And Hereward had learnt that the name of her of the dark blue eyes and ebon tresses was Torfrida, and that she lived alone with her widowed mother. From his prudent questions Hereward learned also that Torfrida was in love with no one, but had allowed, for the sake of protection, a certain powerful Knight of St. Valeri, hight Sir Ascelin, to wear her colours. These, Robert informed his new friend, would be worn by Ascelin at a great tournament to take place immediately at Poitiers. Hereward gathered further that Torfrida was skilled in the art of mechanics, which, in those days, meant much the same as we now understand the witchcraft of the middle ages to have meant, astrology, magic and all the occult sciences. But Hereward only laughed at this and, swearing that there was magic enough in her face alone to enchant the world, promised himself a meeting with that same knight, Sir Ascelin, at Poitiers, and the restoration of Torfrida's favour to that lady.

Dreams of conquest in far distant lands filled Robert's head that night, but it is doubtful if Hereward dreamt of aught but the conquest of one true heart. As usual, no doubt of his power to achieve the adventure mingled with his dream.

A few days later, Hereward with the Flemish knights and his own following set out for Poitiers, where all the champions of France had gathered for the great tournament.

Hereward and his friends were not amongst the last to enter the lists on the opening day, and in the *mêlée* which took place at an early hour they were confronted by a party amongst whom the burly form of a knight, with a white ribbon bound round his helm, was prominent.

"Sir Ascelin," jeered Hereward, "you wear your borrowed plumage too early. Yield it to a better man, or prove your right thereto."

"I have heard of you," growled the knight of the white favour. "You are the English ruffian, the heathen Viking, the drunken Berserker, the boaster, who gabs nightly at Robert's table of the few fights he has seen."

"Well, I will add one to the number," laughed Hereward, as he backed his horse. Ascelin did the same and they met with a tremendous clash. The point of Sir Ascelin's lance just grazed the surface of his opponent's shield and slipped harmlessly along it. Hereward's aim, though he was riding at top speed, was truer. His lance went clean through the shield of the Norman knight and struck full upon the front of the mail shirt he was wearing. Such was the impetuosity of the Saxon's charge that Sir Ascelin was hurled over his horse's croup full ten yards from his saddle and lay stunned, his steed rolling over and over on the mead. Lightly leaping from his horse, Hereward unbound the favour from the helm

of his fallen foe. A moment later the French knights fell on the Flemings in force, but encouraged by their champion's success, the latter met them vigorously and beat them off. Hereward fought with terrible fire and energy and actually drave down three more knights with their horses. None could stand against his charge and a costly day was that for the French knights for, by the rules of the tournament, the defeated champions had to render their arms and horses to their conquerors, the usual plan being to ransom them after the tournament.

There was to be great feasting and merry-making after the contest but Hereward resolved not to stay for this. He had been adjudged—and even the French knights did not gainsay—the best lance of the day, more opponents having been unhorsed by him than by any knight, Flemish or French. He therefore received the victor's reward, a goblet of massive gold, and rode away alone, bearing with him another guerdon of far greater value in his eyes, the white ribbon of Lady Torfrida.

It was a journey of several days then from Poitiers to St. Omer, between three and four hundred miles, and even was already come when Hereward commenced his ride. There were but few inns on the road but he deemed himself able to make the nearest, a distance of some twenty miles, that night.

The sky was filled with scudding clouds which continually chased each other across the moon, so that what light there was was very uncertain. Still Hereward, glancing to right and left from time to time, felt sure that he could discern figures moving among the scrubby bushes scattered over the flat country on either side of him. He increased his pace with a view to leaving them behind but, to his astonishment, they seemed to be continually level with his horse. A moment's thought

showed him that they must be spread at intervals along the road, though this seemed very strange. He discarded at once his first idea that they might be serfs gathering fuel, and, gripping his stout ash-spear more firmly in his hand, he pressed the spurs into his horse's sides and the gallant creature raced towards the inn, from which a red light could now be seen at the bend of the long straight road.

As he rode up to its yard an arrow whistled past his head and a man sprang from a bush at his very side. Quick as thought Hereward drave his lance through the fellow with tremendous force and pinned him to the grass. Leaping from his horse he prepared to offer a desperate resistance, roaring to the host the while to open the door. Out came that worthy, apparently much alarmed, with several young men, and without further molestation Hereward entered the inn.

"They must be robbers, beau sire," said the landlord, a white-haired, tottery old man of about seventy. "My sons shall bar the door and windows and make what defence we may."

"Quick then," said Hereward, "bar the doors but leave us space through which we may thrust at these knaves. Have ye bows here?"

"Nay, lord," answered one of the young men.

"Then I will take my stand at this window with my lance and do ye watch the doors," said Hereward.

Presently through the gloom they saw forms approaching. There was a rush for both door and window. Hereward thrust his lance through the latter and felt it go home. The stout pine door defied all attack and when the assailants had lost another of their number to the deadly spear at the window, they at last drew off.

After an hour of weary waiting, as nothing further

transpired, Hereward bade the host keep strict watch and withdrew to his room. This was a small tumbledown shed, attached to the central structure, the walls of pine-wood covered with skins of wolf and deer. So shaky was the whole lean-to, for it was nothing more, that Hereward could not dream of defending it should the outer entrance be forced. He sat down on an empty box and loosened his great sword in its sheath. As he did so, he heard the sound of voices in whispered converse at the inn door. The language was a barbarous dialect of northern French, but Hereward had no difficulty in making out the general sense.

"Not yet, not yet," the old man was saying, "he has retired but a little while agone. In an hour's time ye may force the door."

"Play thine own part, old weasel," rejoined the voice of a young man; "he passed us on the road and if he made this inn, our lord's orders were that thy sons should settle the matter."

"Ay, ay," whined the host, "but we must make quite sure. Fifty bezants is all I am to get for this; not much, not much. We will make sure. I will give him drink with a charm in it and then I will assay the door in front and one of my sons shall climb the roof in case he forces his way forth, for he is a strong man and a desperate."

"Poison him then with thy drug, old coward," answered the other, "and hark thee, leave this door unbarred in case he rout the lot of ye." He then withdrew, as Hereward perceived through a chink in the wall.

"Oh, ho! mine host," thought he, "I liked not thy manner at first, nor thy feeble resistance. Now what's to do? Ha! I will aid him in his own plan."

His quick resourceful brain had already suggested a scheme of action.

"Ho! mine host," he roared through the door, "broach me a cask of thy strongest wine. Be quick, for I am thirsty after yon set-to."

"Anon, anon, lord," chuckled the old man, and presently appeared at the door with a vast flagon of wine and a venison pasty, which he thrust towards Hereward.

"Now take heed that my rest is not broken or mayhap thou shalt have cause for sorrow," quoth Hereward, smiling the while to himself.

"Nay, nay, I wish you a sound rest, beau sire, sound, very sound, he, he," chuckled the old man.

Hereward's hands twitched as he watched the bald head of this old vulture moving up and down with merriment. Prudent as ever he contented himself by pointing to the door.

"Get thee gone now, old man," said he, "and take good heed that thou pray well to-night, for so it beseems an aged ceorl."

He listened to the old rogue's retreating steps until it seemed to him that they were under his room. "That is strange," thought Hereward, "ha, I have it, the cellar must be below." He fell to searching the floor and was rewarded with the discovery that one of the planks thereof was round and movable. He raised it slightly. A short ladder led down into the darkness.

He now poured his wine into a crevice and lay down with closed eyes. He was considering his plans but desired that any unseen watcher should see him apparently asleep. Therefore he punctuated his thoughts with loud snores.

Presently he heard something climbing his wall from the yard at the back. Then all was silent for a space, until the shuffling step of the old man became just audible

in the intense stillness. It passed without the door and the next moment Hereward saw the host enter with a long dagger in his hand. He took one, two steps forward and then Hereward hurled himself at his ankles. Down came the old fox and in a trice Hereward had seized his throat from behind, and had planted one knee into his back. The next moment there was a sound like the snapping of a stout branch and the knave dropped to the floor, his limbs twitching convulsively.

Hereward now caught up his spear, and gazed closely at the roof. Mounting a box he poised the weapon carefully and then drave it with all his force at the point where the roof let in no light from the sky. A groan answered the stroke and with a grim smile the Saxon raised the movable plank and quietly descended the ladder. The cellar was filled with butts of wine, and first finding the position of the principal entrance by the light of the solitary torch burning in a corner, Hereward proceeded to pile barrel after barrel on top of each other so that no space was left between the floor and the trap-door above. To do this it was necessary to remove another ladder, which done he took his stand beneath the movable plank that covered the opening through which he had lately descended.

There were sounds of several men above him, with a babel of angry voices; then he heard one of the host's sons cry: "He must be below in the cellar; there is a hole here!"

A foot was planted on the first rung. Hereward jerked the ladder away and transfixed the falling body with his spear. Two others instantly swung themselves through the opening and Hereward cut one almost in half as he still hung by his hands. The other ruffian dropped and sprang in within the sword-sweep, aiming a dagger-stroke

at Hereward's throat. Swinging his body to one side, the Saxon smote the knave full between the eyes with his left fist, and as he reeled Hereward swung his great blade in both hands with all the might of his powerful arms. The edge fell clean on the collar-bone and the head was shorn from the body with such force that it struck the opposite wall with a dull heavy thud. Even as he delivered the stroke a spear from above pierced the muscle of his left arm. Wrenching it forth, Hereward hurled it through the opening full in the chest of the man who had thrown it and with such force that the steel point appeared between his shoulders. His remaining companions now fell back aghast, and Hereward determined to take instant advantage of their discomfiture. Running to the further opening he climbed his barricade, and removing one of the barrels he gained the floor above and made his way without to the stables, hoping against hope to find his steed there. The hope was vain. There was no sign of a horse in the stables, naught but the white bear's hide he always carried.

"Anything rather than this nest of traitors," thought Hereward to himself, and climbed the fence of the yard. He knew that the coast must lie north-west and, working in that direction, had the good fortune to secure a farmer's horse from one of the fields and on this sorry mount came, at last, quite worn out, to the sea-cliffs. Secure now from pursuit for that night at least, he chose a kind of natural couch, formed by the weather among the great rocks, and after tethering his horse drew the bear-skin around him and lay him down, a majestic figure, his face turned northward to England.

But his troubles were not over. In the early morning he was aroused by the sound of a horn and, gazing inland, saw a body of some forty men evidently marching toward

where he lay. The loud baying of a bloodhound told Hereward how they had discovered his whereabouts.

"I shall win Valhalla to-day," quoth he to himself, "for how I am to escape those fellows here I know not." Looking over the cliff edge he saw a large hollow with a kind of path leading thereto from the beach, and without further thought he swung himself over the edge and entered the cave, for cave it was, and empty save for a few bones and branches scattered about.

It was quite impossible for his pursuers to attack him with success by the way he had come, while they would have to fight well to slay or capture him by way of the path, their only road. There was a short pause and then: "Descend some of you and try that path," cried a voice, "he must be in some cave below." At the same moment a man swung himself, as Hereward had done, to the ledge, but instantly Hereward struck him full on the chin and he plunged headlong down the cliff to the beach.

There was still the path, a mere track, and very narrow, but three of the more daring spirits made for it without hesitation. Hereward was forced to allow them to gain the ledge, for those above would have been able to reach him with their spears had he stepped from the cave. The position was awkward for both. As the first man set foot on the ledge Hereward hurled his spear with such true aim as to pierce the felon's throat. He fell backward but, nimbly avoiding his body, his two comrades gained a footing. Hereward swept at their legs with his long sword and the men leaping here and there endeavoured to pierce him with their spears. Fortunately those on the cliff's edge, despairing of reaching the Saxon thence, had made their way down the cliff in order to come up by the path. Seeing this Hereward leapt boldly forward and seizing the spear of one of his assailants, he cut

upward at the other's weapon as it was poised at him and shore off its blade. Then twisting the first spear from its owner's grasp, Hereward seized the man himself, and swinging him in his arms as if he had been a child, he hurled him straight into his comrade's face, and the two men fell headlong from the ledge upon their fellows below. A small leather shield had fallen from the hand of one. Seizing this, Hereward swung up his sword and sent his war-cry ringing down the rocks as a challenge to those below. Like a lion bayed by dogs and hunters he stood there, a grand and formidable foe. Little wonder that the men hesitated. Hereward tossed back his head and laughed long. "What!" he cried tauntingly, "have ye enough of me then? Already? Come on, cut-throats and stabbers all, see what ye can do against a man by day. Lo! I have sent your comrades back to you with greetings! Come then, felons, I await you. Soul of Penda! my joints will be cold as your hearts an ye come not soon!"

He began to chaunt in a low tone an old ballad to the warrior kings of Mercia:

"List the ash-spear's hissing kiss!
Hark the battle-adder's sting!
These compose the warrior's bliss
Win Valhalla's Golden Ring!
Lords of the Marches, hail!"

This was too much for the men below and they rushed up the path in single file. But desperate as was their onset they had little chance against the giant blade in Hereward's hand, and frightful confusion ensued as men rolled into their comrades' arms and carried them also down the cliff. Hereward laughed aloud with glee, chaunting ever as he cut fancy figures in the air till the blue steel looked like a broad band of sunlight. Only

a diminished band of the foe now awaited him at the foot of the cliff.

> "See the grey one takes your track,
> Hark the raven at your back,
> On your flank the horny beak,
> Dewy-feathered king-bird's shriek:
> Lords of the Marches, hail!"

The men looked at each other and then up at the splendid figure on the rock. He had conquered, and a moment later they brake and fled. But not yet were they in safety. Hereward seized as many spears as lay to hand and sent them whizzing among the flyers. Two men fell to rise no more. Up the cliff scampered the rest and Hereward laughed grimly as he heard them scudding away like rabbits across the green.

He then collected the weapons of the slain, seventeen in number. With eight who had fallen the last even in the inn, no fewer than twenty-five of the robbers had met their end. But his steed had disappeared, and how he was to proceed to St. Omer he knew not. Presently the broad sea before him suggested a plan, which, wild as it was, seemed yet the best he could adopt in the circumstances.

From his pile of weapons he took a small axe and hewed down a sturdy tree. In a few hours he had hollowed out the trunk and made a mast. Stripping some of the bodies, he formed a rude sail from the garments, and about eventide he launched his rough craft.

He was favoured by a good west wind and a calm night. On the morrow, the morn broke clear and cloudless and naught befel until at even, sighting a large island to the north, he ran his boat ashore.

At first view the island seemed utterly desolate, indeed it reminded Hereward of many a long stretch of dreary fen country in East Anglia. At a second glance he

observed a light on a distant hill-side and set off thither. The track led him to a solidly built farm-house, about which he could discern many cattle-sheds and stables as of some wealthy farmer. He advanced to the door and knocked vigorously but there was no answer. Again he struck and waited but nothing followed. Then Hereward became angry and he smote the door with his fist and to such purpose that the planks gave way, and two or three fell inward. At this a heavy tread was heard approaching the door, and a great man appeared, clad in rough garments, covered by a sheepskin cloak.

"Eye of Odin! What dost thou here at this time of night?" he roared angrily. "Thou hast burst my door and, by Thor, I will so buffet thee that thou shalt have cause to rue the day that brought thee here."

Hereward smiled.

"I have no desire to injure thee," said he. "Let us defer a trial of strength until the morning. I would much rather receive my fare as a gift from thy friendly hands than take it perforce. I am a poor, friendless wayfarer and look to receive my supper and bed from thy kindness. Remember St. Cuthbert himself was a wanderer and took the bounty of King Alfred of glorious memory, wherefore many blessings came to the king."

"Well," quoth the farmer, "I trow thou art no St. Cuthbert, yet a man for all that. So far as a horn of ale will serve and a bed of straw, they are thine. But mind, I hold thee to the buffets to-morrow."

"Faith, friend, I accept thine offer," answered Hereward. "Let us not wish that to-morrow were here."

"Come within then," quoth his host, leading the way On a stout wooden table were set the remains of a mutton pasty, many dough-cakes and wheaten bread.

The farmer pointed to a stool and pushed the pasty towards Hereward. He then refilled his empty tankard from a large black-jack at his side.

"Hold, friend," quoth Hereward, "I also am thirsty." With wide-open eyes, the great farmer filled another tankard, saying as he pushed it towards his guest, "Remember the buffet in the morning."

"Ay," answered Hereward. "Perchance thou shalt have cause to remember it indeed."

"Thou art a cool hand," quoth his host, refilling his own tankard. "Now tell me what brought thee to this island."

Hereward related to him as much of his adventures as he deemed prudent, telling how he had lost his horse and how he was trying to make St. Omer.

"Thou hast overshot the mark then, friend. St. Omer is on the mainland, south-west of this island. But as for a horse, if thou hast need of one, this island is famed for its breed and I have those to sell which, for speed and endurance, thou wouldst find trouble in beating."

"Then let me see thy stable," quoth Hereward. And then and there they went, and by the light of a candle examined the horses. Hereward was particularly pleased with a great mare with very long legs and a deep chest, ugly in the extreme, but evidently sound and long-winded. She had a colt beside her.

When they returned to the house they refilled their tankards, and Hereward pledged his host.

"I am a Saxon," said he, "and I give thee the waes hael, mine host. I will that we close not so jovial an evening without some worthy wager. If thou shouldst worst me in the buffet, I will leave these arms of mine with thee. If the gods should aid my stroke, I take with me that mare and her colt, and thou shalt find me

a boat that will land me on the mainland. Ha! What sayest thou?"

The farmer, nothing doubting his strength, which was the terror of the island, laughed assent. "Why, man," said he, "an I strike thee, thou wilt need a fortnight 'neath my roof ere thou canst walk. Who will pay thy faring then? But we will fight openly. He who can give the finishing buffet is the winner."

"Agreed," said Hereward, and they retired for the night.

When the morning came, the two men faced each other on the meadow land which fronted the farm, and the farmer, with a grim chuckle, thought to end the matter with such a heavy blow at his guest that, had Hereward received it, the combat would assuredly have ended there and then. But dropping his head on his left shoulder, so that the blow shot past him, Hereward leapt in and dealt the ceorl so mighty an uppercut on the chin that he flew into the air like a juggler and fell heavily on his back. The bout was ended and the Saxon, picking up his stunned host, carried him within the house. He then took the mare and colt and rode to the shore, where he found a serf who consented, for a few pieces of silver, to convey them to the mainland on a large raft which lay at hand.

Thus he won, at last, to St. Omer with that mare, whose famous deeds thereafter were to be linked with his own in story and legend.

Swallow did he name her, and her colt he called Light-foot, because of their speed and in kindness to his faithful serf, Martin.

"Torfrida sat alone in her boudoir" 140

CHAPTER X

OF LOVE AND A GREAT FIGHT

In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers;
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.
It is the little rift within the lute,
That by-and-by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

TENNYSON.

TORFRIDA sat alone in her boudoir in St. Omer, a copy of the works of Virgil, that great enchanter (in the eyes of mediæval Europe) on her knees. She was not reading, however, but seemed in a daydream, thinking doubtless of the lances that had been broken for her, perhaps of the knights that had lost their lives for her dear sake, and maybe the light shadow that occasionally crossed her lovely face owed its birth to her pity for these. They had fallen to the powerful lance of Sir Ascelin, the knight of St. Valeri, whom, though she loved him not, she had not actively disliked. Indeed, he had received some sort of countenance, since he served to shield her from the yet more unwelcome attentions of other suitors.

There was one, however, who dominated her thoughts, waking and sleeping, and Sir Ascelin and his kind had small part in her daydream. Since the coming of the golden-haired Hereward with his comely face, mighty frame and mightier deeds, her life seemed all changed.

Girl-like she dreamt of him night and day, without him life was an arid waste ; in his presence the earth became, for her, a Paradise. She knew, too, that he had thought of her. Else what meant the tokens sent to her on his part before the Flemish knights had set out for the tournament ? True, no words had passed between them, but those two glimpses each had caught of the other had been worth hours of speech to both. So subtle is the language of Love.

At first, too, her imagination had been excited by her very ignorance, shared by all the Flemings, as to who this great warrior could be. Her own ancestors had been men of high rank and splendid fame in knightly deeds, and she inherited all that love of the courtly and the noble which distinguished the high-born maiden of the Middle Ages. Therefore she was much delighted to learn that, instead of the nameless Viking he had represented himself to be, Hereward was the son of the third greatest man in England. All prudent considerations vanished like smoke before a strong gale, and she gave herself up entirely to romantic dreams and to the ecstatic joys of new-born love.

A knock at her door broke in upon her reveries and the head of a very old and trusty servant of her mother appeared: "My lady," said she, "there stands without the warrior, Siward the White, with a message from Hereward."

Torfrida rose and went hurriedly into the hall. The young warrior who stood beneath the circular arch of the hall door was an impressive figure. Not very tall was he, but of such breadth as nigh to fill half of the wide doorway. His face was so completely mailed, with ring armour hanging from the helm down the cheeks and with the steel nose-piece used by the Normans, that she could see nothing of his expression.

"Thou art Siward Le Blanc?" she asked.

"Yea, lady," he answered. "I bring you news of the tournament, and a token from my master."

She embraced him in the frank custom of those times, kissing him on either cheek.

"And how fares thy noble master?" asked Torfrida.

"Well and victoriously," answered the warrior in his deep voice. "He greets you, fair and gracious lady, with this your favour, an honour won on the crest of Ascelin of St. Valeri. Three more of the French knights went down, horse and man, to Hereward's lance."

As he held up the ribbon she could not fail to note how intently and with what a curious expression his eyes were fixed upon her, as if he would read her mind. She glanced at his hair, which fell in golden locks about his shoulders, and in a flash she realised the truth. But she must be sure, and so with hands trembling with delight at the return of the favour, she took it from Siward, saying, as listlessly and carelessly as she could:

"Well, Siward, bear my greetings to thy master and say that Torfrida prays that his lady will requite him well with love for this chivalrous service so fairly wrought for me. Well pleased and thankful am I to have my favour back for that I may now bestow it upon my true lover."

The eyes of the young man flashed with anger and Torfrida saw for the first time that they were different in colour, one being blue and the other grey. He turned to depart, saying, in a voice that shook with passion:

"I would rede you, then, lady, to keep the name of your second lover from Hereward lest he fare even worse than the first."

Torfrida laughed.

"Nay, nay, young sir, fear not for him. Hereward

will not harm him." Then she added: "What needs this deception? Thou art Hereward, the best of all warriors, the most famous of all champions." And she seized his hand in hers.

"You are mistaken, lady," said he, coldly withdrawing it. "Nor would I wish to be Hereward, knowing that you love another."

Torfrida flashed a radiant smile at him.

"Nay, my Hereward, I said my true lover should wear the favour. But I did not name him. Couldst thou?"

His eyes looked a question at her and, smiling, she bound the white ribbon upon his helm; truly a fair reply. Hardly was the knot secure when she was folded in his arms, and flushed with sheer pride of possession, Hereward shouted:

"Mine, mine, the Lily of Provence! Who comes to dispute the prize with Hereward, son of Leofric; the slayer of the bear, the queller of the giant, the champion of ladies. Aoi! Aoi! Who fights with Hereward the Berserker, the Viking, the friend of the earn, the wolf and the raven?"

Full strangely did these wild cries sound in Torfrida's ears. Brought up amidst the polished knights of Baldwin's court, she had seen but little of the rougher warriors of England and Scandinavia. But she loved the man, and recognising with love's keen insight that beneath the rough exterior there beat a heart as noble as that of any of the more refined Flemish and French knights she had known, she only murmured:

"Peace, peace, my champion. Torfrida's true knight fights not for the sake of bloodshed but only for the right cause and in defence of the weak. Hereward shall be my perfect knight like Roland of old. Now come, for I have another love-token for thee."

She led him up a narrow ladder to the upper floor and there showed him all the riches of her forefathers, jewels, cups and coins of gold and silver, rich tapestries of Arras, robes of the tanned hide of bear and reindeer, beautifully embroidered with gold and silver, horns for drinking and hunting, and a magnificent byrnie of the finest workmanship and of extreme lightness, made of an innumerable quantity of slight and seemingly frail rings, but the whole forming a garment hard, indeed, for any weapon to pierce. A helm of equally beautiful and superb structure hung above the mail. Hereward stared in utter astonishment.

"Elf-work," he muttered, "forged by trolls, taken from some dragon's hoard of old time!"

"None know who forged it, but this I tell thee, my hero. Who wears that harness is safe in the battle, for no steel may pierce it. Many and many wealthy and powerful nobles of this land and of France, in fair Provence where I was born, in Normandy and here, have sought to win these arms. But I have kept them more jealously than any other heirloom of my forefathers for him whom I should love, and lo! it is to thee that I give them, for I love thee and thee only, now and for ever. And if any weapon of foeman should sever or pierce them, may I receive the like upon mine own body."

Hereward drew the mail-shirt reverently over his head and lo! it fitted him as a glove!

After the which they sat them down together and exchanged other tokens, as lovers will. Then, when Hereward rose to go, Torfrida whispered in his ear:

"Go forth, my love, my champion; go forth to win honour and fame that shall live beyond the ages. But forget not that thou hast a defence more potent than thine invincible armour, and render thanks to the Giver."

"Yea," cried Hereward, "that have I! Your love is mine. What better defence could I need?"

But she shook her head. "Give me thy sword," said she.

Wondering, Hereward drew the great weapon.

Torfrida held the cross-hilt before his eyes and lifted her noble face in a mute appeal that should have spoken louder than words. But the lesson was lost upon Hereward. To him at that moment there was naught in heaven or in earth save the beauty of his newly won love.

Outside in the street he found Martin Lightfoot and some of his men anxiously awaiting him. Martin had been in a terrible state of mind since Hereward's departure from Poitiers, and the faithful runner's delight at meeting his master knew no bounds.

Hereward laid himself down that eve in the guest-house well-nigh worn out with the hardships of his return. But Ascelin had yet another die to throw. That night Hereward's life was attempted by a single man, armed with an axe, but, happily, the felon's approach aroused the chief and a single swinging blow laid the would-be assassin across the coverlet. He was secured by the Danes and proved to be a vile Lett, hired by Ascelin, to whom, Hereward now learnt, he was indebted for the perils that had beset his return from Poitiers. The Lett's right hand was cut off and h· was driven forth with orders to tell his master that Hereward would kill him at sight. Upon this Ascelin judged it prudent to return to Normandy, where he soon found work more than enough to do.

Soon after this adventure Robert, Baldwin's elder son, came to St. Omer in search of Hereward. The Frieslanders had revolted and refused to pay the tribute due to their overlord. Would Hereward take command of

one of the armies about to be sent against them? A fleet also was to go in support of the land forces and to bring provisions, military engines and other equipments. Great dishonour, said Robert, had been put upon Baldwin by these men of Scaldmariland, who had shamefully treated his bodes sent to demand the tribute. They had been seized, blinded in one eye and deprived of the left foot. Therefore it was only right that a fitting revenge should be taken on the barbarians. Robert concluded by appointing Hereward his "Magister Equitum," or "Master of the Knights," and to the sorrow of Torfrida, her champion gladly undertook the war, being weary of his short spell of rest. And in the Zeeland wars which followed, the warcraft of the Saxon chief was so successful that the Frisians came to think him a magician. Poorly armed and half clothed as they were, they proved an easy prey to the mail-clad warriors of Robert, and the ruses Hereward employed soon won three battles, the last stand of the Frisians being made (as, by the irony of Fate, was made that of Hereward's own countrymen a year or so later, at Hastings) in a certain remote place, where, says the chronicler, "they were being slain with javelins and missiles from the engines, even up to the shadowy night." The poor savages submitted; Robert doubled the annual tribute and ordered the land to be rated.

From this time Hereward was the most esteemed warrior in Baldwin's dominion. He was Robert's right-hand man in all things, and as Master of the Knights gained good pay, both in money and lands. In public life he enjoyed wealth and fame, but "the course of true love never did run smooth," and there were dissonant chords in his courtship of Torfrida. These arose chiefly from the difference of race, Torfrida being a Provençale

by birth, Hereward, as all know, an Angle or, rather, an Anglo-Dane. Many of his traits of character both good and bad were almost unknown in the more polished and civilised life of the Flemish court, in which Torfrida had spent her girlhood. Chief among these racial characteristics were the love of drinking and of boasting common to the Scandinavians, Angles and Saxons. By these races habits of the kind were considered rather as attributes than as vices. Had they not strongly characterised Beowulf, the pattern and ideal of the hardy, active Viking and the sturdy and self-assertive though sluggish Englishman?

As a true Anglo-Dane, Hereward drank long and often at Count Robert's table and bragged of his great deeds to his heart's content, and also very much to that of the Flemings, who, like the other Latin races, were accustomed to "gab," as it was called, that is, to lay claim to and tell of impossible exploits for the purpose of laughing at them. Hereward's boasting, however, was in deadly earnest, though he would often exaggerate the magnitude of his exploits in a way that made Torfrida feel much ashamed of herself and, at last, of him.

He did not scruple to brag, not only of his deeds in Northumbria, Cornwall and Ireland, but also of his victory at the tournament, and each time he related this, the number of knights he had overcome increased in an alarming manner. At first four, it soon became eight, and then twelve, and those of the Flemish knights who had also done well in the contest thought their own exploits belittled; and though none cared to quarrel outright with the famous Englishman a great many bitter sneers passed round the table, so that Torfrida was in a constant state of fear lest Hereward should perceive that he was being insulted. But so great was

his own conceit that it did not occur to him that others might rate him at less than his own estimate.

At last he awoke to the true state of affairs. He had been telling the story of the tournament which, as usual, lost nothing in the telling. It happened that there was at Baldwin's court at the time a stranger knight of great stature, about seven feet high, the tallest man Hereward had ever seen. His race no one knew for certain, but his long golden hair and blue eyes gave him a certain likeness to Hereward, so that most thought him an Englishman. He was, however, always quiet and reserved, as became a chance guest passing through a foreign land. He had only one follower with him, a short fellow, much about the same height and breadth as Hereward himself, very powerfully built. Every one was interested in them and Baldwin himself appeared to know more of them than any one else; but, like the discreet prince he was, he said nothing. On this occasion the mighty stranger appeared to be carefully listening to Hereward's tale of the tournament. When he had finished, the great man remarked, in a voice that rolled around the hall like the mutter of thunder, that the Poitiers fight must indeed have been wondrous, but that he had once had a bout in England that dwarfed even it.

"How? Let us hear!" exclaimed some five or six Flemish knights, scenting fun.

Count Robert, seeing Hereward's face flush with anger, shook his head, while Torfrida looked imploringly at her lover as if to beg him to keep the peace.

"Well," said the stranger, "my affairs once took me to Boston in Lincolnshire and there, in an inn, I had a wordy strife with some of the boasting Anglo-Danes, who, simply because they have been settled in England a long while, always hold that the English are better

fighting men than the Swedes, Danes and Norwegians, their own forefathers. So just for the nonce I challenged any six of them to come on, with any weapons they chose. They promptly agreed."

"You lie, sir knight," broke in Hereward. "No true Anglo-Dane ever brought even two to one against a foe."

"Thou'rt not polite," replied the tall man, "but so it was. Maybe these were no *true* Anglo-Danes, but mere roistering swashbucklers, like some I have seen, with naught else to do. Well, as I said, we came to sword-strokes without the inn, and I made such a mighty swing with my good weapon that two heads flew off at the stroke. I could hardly feel the blows they rained on me, no more force had they than boys' strokes. I stunned another ceorl with my sword-hilt and then, dropping the weapon, dashed two more heads together. Thus won I to victory!"

There were broad smiles around the table as Hereward, with a sneer, leaned across and said pointedly:

"Come, this will not do, Sir Longshanks! You have forgotten the sixth man. What fate did you mete out to him?"

"Ah, well," said the stranger, "that is the wonder of the matter. It is surely no great deed to kill a few English! But the sixth killed me!"

A general roar of laughter almost drowned his words, but Hereward's eyes grew red with rage.

"Thou fool of a liar," he roared. "How art thou here then? Thou shouldst be in Hela's realm, for none such as thou ever won Valhalla!"

"'Tis certainly strange," replied the stranger coolly. "But not when all is told. The sixth man was thyself, Hereward Leofricsson!"

Hereward sprang to his feet and gripping the table with both his hands till the cups and platters thereon rang again, he shouted:

"Thou'rt mad! Dost think thou couldst survive the death-stroke from any man, much less from me!"

"More than probable," replied the strange warrior, keeping his seat; "seeing that most of the men thou dost slay in thy stories are alive at the present hour."

The hall resounded with the storm of laughter which Robert in vain tried to check. Hereward strode round the bench to where the big man was sitting and looked him up and down.

"Thou'rt the biggest fool I've seen in a few years' journeying," he said, quietly enough now. "But big bullocks have little brain, and end in the slaughter-house. Thou askest for thy death. So be it!"

The stranger rose.

"Thou art a great boaster, Hereward, but almost the only Englishman I would trouble myself to fight. For a dozen of years I've longed for a bout with thee. Thou shalt stand for England and I for the Northland. But my name I will not tell to thee!"

"I care not the worth of a sceat for thy name," snarled Hereward. "'Tis thy blood must answer now. Wilt pick that up?" And taking the gauntlet Robert proffered, he hurled it with a clatter to the floor.

"Your French custom, I think," said the stranger, raising it carelessly. "I choose axes, swords and a fight in the good old style, on foot, without fear or favour."

"So be it, in the name of Loki or Odin, which thou wilt," quoth Hereward. "But for my last word I rede thee ask my pardon for all thine insults to England and to me this day. Else wilt thou never see to-morrow's light. I am Hereward!"

"Enough of thy words," replied his enemy. "I will cure thee once and for all of thine o'erweening brag. But I grieve that thou art such a little man. Were't not for thy great name, I could hope for small glory from killing thee."

"Bulk is naught," replied the doughty little Englishman. "For England and the Northland will we lay on. And, my faith, thou'lt keep Flemish wolves and ravens gorged for twice a se'nnight!"

With these last shafts they parted to prepare for the combat. As Hereward left the hall, Torfrida came to his side:

"You are drunken," said she, "and you have made such a scene this day as the court will hardly forget. I shall never be able to hold up my head among ladies and gentlefolk again. In future never speak to me. I will have a knight for my lover, no tipsy roisterer. You hear?"

"Ay and mark," answered Hereward. "For me I'll have a maiden that loves me rather than court manners. There are as good fish in the sea as e'er came out thereof." And he passed on.

Now Robert had done his best to stay the combat, but without avail. So yielding at length he decided that it should be fought in an amphitheatre floored with firm sand, and in sight of all who wished to behold it. For himself he would second Hereward.

The stranger refused the good offices both of Baldwin, Robert's brother, and of the Count of St. Omer. He would have none, he said, but his own faithful henchman. So amid deafening applause the two champions stepped into the arena and faced each other, unarmed.

Each in his own way was a perfect specimen of manhood in the fullest pride of physical strength. But Hereward

looked like a boy as he stood by the mighty stranger. The latter had a magnificent head of golden hair that almost rivalled Hereward's, and his long beard of the same hue reached almost to his waist. His hands and feet were somewhat too large, nevertheless these were well formed and shapely. The expression of his eyes was rather that of the dreamer or poet than of the warrior, but at times they would flash like the sun-glint on a shield wall.

Shorter by more than the head and shoulders, the Englishman stood beside him, and would have seemed dwarfed by the mighty stature of his foe, save for his own enormous breadth. The muscles of his neck and shoulders rose and fell as he moved. They were like to the corded knots wrapped around some giant oak of the forest. His golden hair fell in curls below his waist, and his step was quick and agile as a dancer's. Seen together thus, they seemed, to the shrewd observer and the practised fighter, a well-matched pair, and it was only among the merchants and other civilians that the whisper went round:

"Why, this is one of the giants or Thor himself! What chance has our Hereward, good man though he be, against such a tower?"

Thunders of applause rent the air as Robert and the henchman proceeded to arm their men. Hereward had brought his old byrnie and helm, discarding, in his pride and anger against her, Torfrida's gift. He carried the giant's great sword, a Danish double axe, and a round Saxon shield. His foe was similarly armed.

They got to work quickly with the swords; the blows of the huge warrior seemed indeed as if urged by more than mortal strength, and well was it for Hereward that he knew, from long practice in youth with travelling masters of fence, the use of the weapon as none other

of that age knew it. Natheless so mighty were the blows he guarded that they beat him back staggering time after time. He could do little more than defend himself and he returned the strokes of his foe only rarely, when he saw an opening. Tiring of this at length, the great man, flinging down his shield, bounded suddenly on his foe and, with his full strength, aimed so mighty a two-handed down-stroke upon Hereward's head that though the latter interposed his shield it was shorn clean in two and even the headpiece itself was split. The Englishman fell heavily on the sanded floor. As he fell a terrified scream from some woman in that vast assembly pierced the air, breaking the hush of the awe-stricken crowd. But the blow had its price and Hereward's quick eye had not missed the chance. Even as the great blade descended on his shield he had aimed a shrewd thrust at his rival's unguarded arm-pit, and when he regained his feet, still somewhat dazed, his foe was leaning on his sword, in a pool of his own blood.

"The axes," cried some voices.

"Ay, the axes," quoth the great man, throwing his blade away and gripping the huge Danish axe with both hands. The pause lasted a moment only. Then Hereward ran straight at his foe, his long hair streaming behind as he charged, and the two men closed with a storm of furious blows. Round and round they whirled, hacking and hewing, but drawing no blood. This could not last for ever. Again the great arms of the giant whirled the axe aloft. Quick though he was, the Englishman could not entirely avoid the stroke. Like lightning-flash the keen edge glanced down the side of his head, shearing off some locks of hair and falling upon his shoulder, scattering the rings of his mail and inflicting a huge gash from which the blood spurted into the air.

Sad would it have been for Hereward had not his foe overbalanced himself as he delivered the deadly stroke. Quick to take advantage of the stumble, Hereward dealt a slashing cut which severed the steel head from the haft of his enemy's axe. In a flash the giant sprang sideways at him and seized his axe. Then began a terrible struggle between the two men who, sorely wounded as they were, seemed each to have the strength of ten. They rolled over and over on the sand, and everywhere their track was marked by the red blood that flowed from their dreadful wounds. At last they won free from the deadly close and struggled to their feet, when it was seen that the big man held the axe. He was in the act of striking at the unguarded head of his foe, but even as men hushed their breath at the imminent fate of the Englishman, the giant's strength failed, and turning in his hand the weapon descended flatwise on Hereward's head. As it fell the young man sprang into the air and dealt his foe a shattering blow with clenched fist full on the chin, felling him to earth. With the effort Hereward also sank to the ground, alike indifferent to the ear-splitting applause that seemed to rend the very clouds. The fight was at an end. Never had Flanders seen such a one! Surely the gods of Valhalla had come down from Asgard city to fight among men!

There came a day when the two champions were again able to walk, and their friends brought them into the hall. No sooner were they seated opposite each other than the giant addressed his adversary:

"Hereward," said he, "thou art an Englishman. Since England boasts one son like thee, I withdraw my scathing words. Thou art a boaster notwithstanding, but a man who might fight Thor himself. There is my

hand an thou wilt. I go to England shortly and we may meet again."

He rose and Hereward likewise. Taking his outstretched hand the Englishman replied:

"A glad day will it be for me when we meet again, or friends or foes. Never have I had such a fight. But wilt thou not renew it a few days hence? For an thou goest not to England as a friend, small chance will there be that we meet again in this world at least! 'Twere better to raise Hela's fyrds and fight them than the English!"

The great man laughed and seemed to think awhile. Then he muttered in his beard:

"'Tis perhaps as well for some folk that England hath not thy peer to guard her shores. As for fighting thee now," he continued aloud, "I would rather embrace thee, for 'twas due to thy forbearance that the head flew from mine axe rather than from my shoulders!"

And embrace they did, and that warmly, ere the stranger left Baldwin's hospitable roof.

"Thou shalt hear from me, Hereward, ere we meet again," said his late foe as they parted.

"'Tis well," answered Hereward. "But Wyrd shapeth the destinies of us all and weaveth the web of our lives. She goes aye as she will!"

Baldwin, for some reason or other, was furious when he heard of the fight. But all he said to Hereward was:

"I give thanks to Heaven that thou livest. We could ill afford to lose thee."

So frightened had Torfrida been when she saw her lover all but slain that she forgot her grievance and they were again all in all to each other. And the noble girl returned with new devotion to her self-imposed task of making of her rough champion a modest, God-fearing

and perfect knight, *sans peur et sans reproche*. Truly a labour of love was this to her and never was there a more self-denying, loyal and loving heart than that of the Provençale maiden. Very gradual was the change in Hereward's life. Accustomed to lording it with iron hand over all, to having his least wish gratified, to following his own counsel in everything, it was difficult indeed to soften his already formed character. But little by little the ever-loving devotion of the girl whom, with all his faults, he devotedly adored, inspired his soul and fanned to renewed life the half-quenched embers of his innate nobility. He became less ready to pick a quarrel, far more temperate and modest, and never again, after the great fight, did Fleming strive to ridicule him. All saw that, if he did boast, he had at any rate powers which might excuse a little boastfulness in any man.

When autumn was giving way to winter Hereward and Torfrida were wedded amid the rejoicings of all the good folk of St. Omer. Baldwin himself was present at the marriage ceremony and Count Robert gave the bride away. Was it by chance that at that time Gilbert of Northumbria came to St. Omer and that Torfrida, looking for bridesmaids, found none fairer than a certain lovely Saxon girl, his ward, whose beauty soon became the talk of Flanders and earned for her the name of the "Rose of England"?

CHAPTER XI

A DIRE SPELL FROM ENGLAND

And the best names that England knew
Claimed in the death-prayer dismal due
Yet mourn not, Land of Fame.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

NOW after his marriage all went well with Hereward for a considerable time. Torfrida herself was very wealthy and, in addition to his prosperity, honour enough was Hereward's after his great fight with the unknown champion.

Torfrida, of course, knew nothing of his early relations with the fair ward of Gilbert of Northumbria and Ghent. Hereward had presented his bride to that worthy nobleman and afterwards had merely said that he had known Alftruda as a child at Gilbert's castle in Northumbria. He was very glad to learn from Gilbert that Dolfin, son of Gospatric, the cousin of King Malcolm of Scotland, was betrothed to Alftruda and would shortly arrive in Flanders. This Dolfin was well known to Hereward, who had fought by his side in his first battle, under the banner of old Earl Siward Digri, against Macbeth, usurper of the Scottish throne, at Dunsinane.

The Frisians having been thoroughly beaten, Baldwin was now at peace. In fact a kind of lull seemed to have fallen upon Europe, and no war news came to Bruges or St. Omer from any of the great countries bordering

Flanders. But it was the lull before the storm, which, when it broke, seemed the more violent for the brief period of peace which had preceded it.

In his own Westminster Edward of England had been laid to rest and Edgar the Ætheling, the last heir of Cerdic's line, was a mere boy of thirteen or fourteen years, of Norman education and manners, a puppet in the hands of the strong-willed and grasping men who surrounded him. Far too stormy were those times for the Witan to select such a prince to fill the English throne, and they had passed over the claims of Edgar, choosing for the first time—for their choice of the great Knut was compulsory—one not of the royal Wessex family. Harold, son of Godwin, was their choice, the most capable ruler and leader of men in England. To strengthen his country, King Harold had put away Edith the Swan-neck and had allied his house with the great rival family of Leofric by marrying Aldyth, sister of Edwin and Morcar and niece of Hereward himself.

Another claimant to the throne of England now presented himself. William, Duke of Normandy, declared that King Edward had promised him the succession and he proclaimed Harold over Europe as a false and perjured traitor, who had sworn on the bones of all the Saints to help William to the throne. Next came news that William had obtained the blessing of the Pope, with a banner called the Gonfanon, likewise blessed by the Holy Father, who also had given him a hair of St. Peter himself enclosed in a ring, to be carried before the mighty host he was assembling at Rouen.

Then came Tostig Godwinsson to St. Omer, a wolf's-head, outlawed by his brother for his barbarous atrocities to his Northumbrian subjects—he had been earl of that ancient kingdom for a short time when the house of

Godwin was paramount in England. Soon after this Hereward received a message from the hero king of Norway, the Viking's darling and poet-warrior, the Lion-slayer, the Varanger, even Harold Hardrada himself!

It appeared that Tostig, burning with rage and hatred to his brother for the just sentence of outlawry passed upon him, a sentence which Harold could by no means have prevented, had gone, first to William of Normandy and then to Harold of Norway, and had stirred each of these great leaders to make a descent on England. William, indeed, was almost resolved on this before Tostig's arrival, and by urging the success of Knut and the internal dissensions in England which, said Tostig, would leave her an easy prey to the first invader, Hardrada was finally persuaded. He now sent word to Hereward, promising him not only the restitution of his father's lands at Bourne, but the earldom of Mercia which Leofric had held.

Hardrada, no doubt, intended to rule England under the same system that Knut had established. That is, the division of the country into four great earldoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex, under four earls, with himself as overlord. Knut's system had answered well enough at the time when it was founded, but under a weak ruler it had left the country in the hands of a small aristocracy who were divided against themselves, a state of affairs which greatly helped towards a possible invasion.

The messenger arrived at Hereward's abode in St. Omer, the house that had been Torfrida's and in which he lived during the whole of his stay in Flanders, and lo! the bode was none other than that same sturdy henchman who had attended the giant champion with whom Hereward had fought so mighty a single combat.

"Skall to thee, son of Leofric!" he cried. "My master Harold, the noble King of Norway, sends greeting. Thou and I have met as foes and each has proved the other's worth. It is time to be friends. Thou owest England naught. Fight then by my side 'neath the Land Waster, ne'er yet unfurled without victory, and thou shalt have thy father's earldom, even the great earldom once a kingdom, of Mercia. For I have need of such swords as thine."

"Come thou within, comrade," quoth Hereward, "and sit thee down at board. So thy master with whom I fought was Harold the Lionslayer himself, the most famous champion in Europe."

"'Tis a truth," answered the henchman between his mouthfuls; "Harold is the best man in Europe and thou, brave Hereward, art second."

"Eh!" said Hereward, "methinks I showed myself a close second. But 'tis meet that thou, in loyalty, shouldst ever praise thy master above all men. What art thou called?"

"Eric Ulfsson is my name and 'tis well known in Norway," answered the henchman.

"Thou speakest truth. I have often heard of thy strength and thy splendid axemanship," answered Hereward. "Right fain am I of seeing thee, but do thou bid King Harold remember my last words to him that it were better that he should go to England as friend than as foe. There are no more dangerous and stubborn fighters in Midgard than we English, and he will find our fighting very different from that of Turk, Greek or Saracen. And say to him that there is no chief alive under whose banner Hereward would as soon fight as under his, but that he cannot draw sword against his own country. Therefore, being an outlaw he will neither

fight for nor against Harold Hardrada, though dearly would he love to do either."

"Ay thou hast the right, brave Hereward," answered Eric. "My master will grieve much, as I do, at failure to win so stout a champion, but neither he nor I (thy pardon, Harold, that I name thee in the same breath as thy humble thrall) would ever strike at our mother Norway, Queen of the Fiords. So I drink to thee, Hereward, hoping that when Harold Hardrada is England's king, thou wilt return to peaceful possession of thine own, in England. Skall! Skall!"

"Drinc hael!" answered the famous Englishman. "Full fain would I be of seeing thy noble master or thyself again, but Wyrd goeth aye as she will and who knoweth the doom of the Norns, or who may gainsay it?"

"No man, lord," answered Eric and, saluting, took his leave. Little indeed of *his* web had the Norns e'en then left unspun, but for Hereward a long and tangled skein was yet awaiting.

Not long after this there came other offers to Hereward, first from Harold Godwinsson, King of England, and then from William, Duke of Normandy. But Hereward was still too bitter against the family of Godwin to accept the first. To him Harold was only an equal, and he could not think of him as Basileus of Britain and as filling the throne of the God-descended line of Cerdic. Still more did he despise the groundless claim of William.

Both the Norman duke and Hardrada (through the faithless Tostig) were recruiting in Flanders with great energy and zeal. And both met with much success, for Baldwin felt bound to aid his own sons-in-law. For William, as all know, had taken to wife Matilda, Baldwin's daughter, while Tostig had wedded her sister Judith.

So Hereward was compelled to remain passive while

all the great preparations for England's destruction were being made.

At last news came that Hardrada and Tostig had sailed up the Humber and had set foot on English soil. Edwin and Morcar had raised Northumbria against them but the Land Ravager had triumphed at Fulford. The great city York had yielded.

Then, too, they in St. Omer heard how at last, by favour of the Saints, his allies, the adverse winds had changed and William's armament had landed on the south coast at Pevensey.

For months after this came naught but vague rumours, so slowly did news travel in those days. Then fugitive after fugitive flocked into Flanders.

First came a Norseman bringing tidings of the rout of Hardrada and Tostig at Stamford Bridge. Brought into Hereward's house he told how while the Norwegian army was in two divisions one on each side of the river Derwent, Harold of England, marching rapidly from the south, had attacked the smaller division upon the bank nearest York and had routed it. He told also how Eric Ulfsson, to enable the main army under the King of Norway to form their battle, had held the bridge with his single axe and slain no fewer than forty Saxons with that terrible weapon, until one spearman in a boat had pierced him from beneath, through the old planks of the bridge. How that Hardrada, swinging his vast sword in front of his famous Land Ravager, had cut his way to the heart of the Saxon force and had almost reached Harold when the Norns had winged the deadly arrow that pierced the throat of the poet-hero, the darling of the North. And Hereward mourned in his very soul, the death of the Viking's ideal hero, whom from his boyhood he had loved and striven to rival in deeds of fame, whom

he had loved yet more since he knew that he had indeed fought with him in person. Tostig, too, was dead, but he was a Godwinsson and a traitor, thought Hereward. He had got his deserts for the brutal murder of Ulf Dolfinsson and Gamel Ormsson, the former the son of Dolfin, husband of Alftruda, and Hereward's friend and shoulder-companion at Dunsinane.

Then came the terrible news of the downfall of Wessex, with the death of Harold, King of England, and of his brothers Gurth and Leofwin at Hastings. Last of all came Githa, widow of Earl Godwin. After having escaped from the siege of Exeter and enduring untold miseries in hiding on the Flat-Holmes near Severn mouth, she had succeeded in bribing the master of a ship to bring her to St. Omer. She brought news which concerned Hereward more nearly than even the terrible tidings he had already heard.

For William, master of the south, was fast subduing Mercia as well. The strange and wavering conduct of the young Earls Edwin and Morcar, sons of Alfgar, had been to him of great advantage. To Edwin he had promised the hand of his fair daughter Adelaide, and the two had seen and loved each other. Both the young earls, especially Edwin, were very handsome and were idolised by their subjects of Mercia and Northumbria. But their hesitation before Hastings was fatal to England's cause. For some reason, known to none, they remained at London instead of uniting their forces with that of their brother-in-law, King Harold. Perhaps they hoped that the conqueror, be he William or Harold, would again, as the price of their friendship, make Mercia and Northumbria into kingdoms, as they had been in the old days of the Heptarchy. Be that as it may, their conduct throughout the conquest was marked by an indecision which, at length, proved fatal to both.

Hereward learnt that not only the lands of his nephews but those of his widowed mother had been given to menials, Angevin peasants, Norman horseboys, the scum of France.

To and fro, up and down his room he paced that night like a caged lion. Perhaps the choice of Achilles seemed in that hour to present itself to him—long life with wealth but without honour, or early death and deathless fame. Perhaps the same thought that inspired Sir Walter Scott, ages later, influenced his decision :

> Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,
> To all the sensual world proclaim
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name;

for he chose the perilous plan of going at once to England to do what he might for the safety of his kinsfolk at Bourne.

He had but one duty left in Flanders. He had been challenged by the Viscount of Pinkney. That could wait. He would return shortly and sent word to Baldwin to that effect.

Who shall paint the struggle between love and duty that raged in Torfrida's breast that night ? But Hereward was acting according to her precepts—all dictates of honour, loyalty to ties of blood, chivalry to the oppressed, pointed northward to England as his only course. Fighting down her love and fear the true-hearted girl not only yielded to his arguments but urged him to go.

The next morning Hereward, with Martin and a few Danish house-ceorls to sail and watch the ship, set the dragon prow of his long vessel north toward the shores of England.

CHAPTER XII

WILD WORK IN BOURNE

Therefore shall the spear,
Full many a morn-cold, of hands be bewounden,
Uphoven in hand ; and no swough of the harp
Shall waken the warriors ; but the wan raven rather
Fain over the fey many tales shall tell forth,
And say to the erne how it sped him at eating,
While he with the wolf was a-spoiling the slain.
" Beowulf."
(*Translated by* Morris *and* Wyatt.)

ARRIVING one evening at the port of Boston, Hereward proceeded inland with Martin alone, leaving the ship in care of the house-ceorls. It was dark when they came to Bourne. Their road brought them right up to Peter's pool and the high grass-grown banks of Leofric's ancient hall, but Hereward was too wise to cross the moat. The hall blazed with light and shouts of uproarious mirth were borne to them again and yet again.

" Let us try Pery's house, Martin," said Hereward. " Where is it ? "

" Here, lord," said Martin's voice from the gloom, a few yards away.

Hereward found him standing at the door of a small cabin or hut of planks, roofed with thatch. They listened without but all was silent.

Hereward knocked. There was no response. He

knocked again yet louder, and a third time. Then a voice within answered sullenly :

" Begone, in Odin's name, whoe'er thou art."

" I ask shelter for myself and my man," answered Hereward.

" Look you, Sir Norman," said another voice, and a wicket window was thrown open, " drive us not to despair. Ride on to the hall to your lord for an you press us further, by Thor's hammer I will brain you with this axe."

" I am no Norman, good fellow," answered Hereward in halting Mercian, " but a Flemish knight. I have lost my way amid your swamps and can go no further this night. Is this your Danelagh good fellowship we hear so much of even in Flanders ? "

There was a pause and the door was opened by an old soldier of Leofric's, Pery Asered by name :

" Come in then, sir," said he. " We know you not ; but we would fain hear of Flanders."

Martin led the horse to the yard and then followed his master.

Looking around him Hereward saw a few of his father's former house-ceorls, and even one or two of the wild young blades, now grown into stalwart men, who had followed him in the reckless days of his boyhood. He drew back into the shadow. They eyed him with curiosity but it seemed to him as if a heavy cloud of grief lay on each man's mind and their glances were dull and lacked intelligence.

" You seem sad, my friends," said Hereward. " Might a stranger, without rudeness, inquire what ails you all ? "

" Nay, sir," said Pery, shaking his head ; " we know you not."

" Martin," said Hereward quickly, " go get my horse.

I suspect these fellows. They are no honest Englishmen to be so mistrustful. They are menials in the Norman service, I promise thee. Quick now!"

Martin sprang to his feet, but a storm of curses broke from the company. "Serfs of the accursed French," cried Pery. "We be free men, owing no obedience save to the countess, our poor lady at the hall. Dare you gainsay me?" And he gripped his double axe threateningly.

"Well then, learn that I hate the French as I do Hela's gates," answered Hereward, "and trust me. In Flanders I knew one Englishman from these parts and a finer fellow never trod in Midgard. I was his shoulder-companion for ten years and more."

"His name, sir knight, his name," cried every man in the hut.

At that moment a firm step sounded without and Pery sprang to his feet.

"Ye make much noise here, Saxon pigs," said a voice. "Best keep silence lest your tongues be shorter ere the morning light."

"It is a Norman from the hall," whispered Pery. "Hide yourself, fair sir," to Hereward. "He will be coming in."

"Open the door, dog," said the same voice again.

Pery looked at Hereward.

"Open the door," said his guest.

Pery did so and there entered a common-looking fellow armed in the Norman style, with pear-shaped shield and spear, and wearing a helm with nose-piece complete.

His eye fell on Hereward.

"Why, who art thou?" he asked.

Hereward looked at him meaningly, and then glanced at the Saxons: "I'd have a word with thee without

my friend," said Hereward in French. "There is treason about these parts."

"Come then," said the soldier.

Hereward followed him and returned ere many minutes had gone by. "He will trouble you no more, friends," said he.

"What have you done, sir knight?" asked Pery.

"We fell out and I struck him," answered Hereward. "'Twere best to bury him and say naught. Perhaps you will now believe that I am a foe to the French!"

Two men went without and found the Norman lying at some distance from the hut. There was a blue bruise just above his left temple and a portion of the helm had penetrated the skull. Taking the body up they hurried to the back of the hut, and then came in once more.

"Faith," said Pery, "'twere right perilous to quarrel with you, sir! But we shall have trouble over this when they search for him to-morrow."

"Maybe," said Hereward carelessly. "But what if there should be no inquiry? They are so merry over there"—he pointed in the direction of the hall—"that methinks they are all fey."

"Ay, they are merry," growled Geri from the corner, "and well drunken by now, I warrant."

"Well, why not drink yourselves?" asked Hereward, whose one object was to restore their confidence and win their trust.

"I see no harm in another horn of mead," said Pery. "Fill round, men, and give this drinc hael to our noble guest."

The house-ceorls, who were secretly delighted at the death of the Norman, drank lustily to Hereward, who rose. "Waes hael! friends all," said he. "Let us drink to the health of your noble lady."

The men became silent again but Hereward affected to jest with them. "Come, come, my stout fellows," said he, "what is your trouble? 'To-day to thee, to-morrow to me,' the old adage hath it, and 'tis a good rede as you know."

Then Pery unfolded an evil story. Three days before there had come a vile foreign ceorl, with a band of some twenty men, and proclaiming that the king had given Bourne to him, he had marched up to the hall and broken into the privacy of their Lady Godiva, demanding the treasures of Earl Leofric. Not content with this they had grossly insulted the noble lady, whereupon Godwin, her young son, a boy of sixteen, had drawn on them and slain two of their number. The rest had then murdered the lad and had stuck his head on the gable of the hall. After which the French, infuriated at the loss of their comrades, had behaved as brute beasts and were now in the hall, riotously celebrating their lord's entry into possession.

It needed all of Hereward's strong self-control to keep an unruffled face as he heard of the murder of the little brother he had so often teased and hectored in the days of their childhood. But Martin, who was watching his lord closely, observed that his teeth were fast set, and, thought he: "I would not be one of those French to-night, no, not for Bourne or even for Burgh!"

As Pery told his tale the men groaned in chorus, and Leofric, Hereward's playmate and harper when a boy, cried aloud:

"Would that Hereward our lord were but here! Not one of the knaves would see the morning light!"

"Hereward! why so was called the English warrior whom I knew in Flanders. Methought from his broad tongue that he came from these parts," said their guest.

Then the men told how Leofric, angry at the violent outbreaks that had marked the youth of Hereward, his second son, had driven him from the country.

When the tale was ended, the house-ceorls, being sleepy, dight them to rest upon their turf-bundles. Hereward, too, lay for a while on his sedge, thinking deeply as the sounds of revelry at the hall were borne to his wakeful ear.

"Wouldst earn five pennies, lad?" he suddenly asked of a boy who lay close by his feet.

"Ay, gladly, noble sir."

"Then get me a dark garment, a maid's cloak, anything to cover me; I cannot sleep and must breathe fresh air."

"Now hearken," as the boy brought a dark cloak, "an thou sayest a word, I will give thee even such a buffet as I gave yon French dog, and sorry should I be, for thou art a Saxon lad. There is thy money."

Wrapping the cloak round him as he lay, Hereward nudged Martin with his foot.

Martin listened, crept to the door at the rear and cautiously opened it. Hereward followed him into the night and a minute's walk brought them to the earth-banks of his old home. Something moved in the air above their heads. The long golden tresses of a fair lad! Stifling a groan, Hereward looked around. Then like a cat, he sprang on a low penthouse, swarmed up to the gable and brought down the head. Wrapping it in the cloak he laid it gently down. Then creeping round the building he looked through a window.

Fourteen or fifteen men and women, all more or less drunken, were reclining in all manner of positions at a great table spread with food and drink enough to last at least three days. Above them burned a profusion of the long wax candles found only in the houses of the

wealthy Saxons. In the middle of the room a jester performed clumsy antics in imitation of English dancing, singing ribald songs to a lute the while, and every now and then pausing to give utterance to some foul gibe. In Earl Leofric's high seat sat a low-born menial of Gilbert of Ghent's, a fellow Hereward had often seen in Flanders.

Presently the jester asked a boon of this new lord. "Gramercy, sir," said the fellow, "grant me yon proud Saxon dame who rode once through Coventry in the garb of Eve. An you will I'll make her follow me through Bourne in like wise, afoot."

A roar of applause followed. Hereward bit his lip through.

"Thou foul-mouthed knave," said a girl to the jester. "There is yet living a famous soldier, brother of the young lord slain yestereve, a man well known in our country, Flanders. Have a care. Hereward, son of this Leofric, would——"

"Shut thy mouth, slut," cried her master. "That fellow cannot bear daylight. I know the scoundrel, he stole the gifts sent to our count from Scaldmariland, he, the Master of the Knights, distributed among his followers gifts sent to Baldwin. Let him but show his face this side the Alps and he will soon be swinging on a gibbet."

Hereward, now furious, crept round to Martin.

"'Tis time to strike, Martin," said he hoarsely, "stay thou here and cut them off. Let not one escape."

Martin drew back, axe aloft, into the shadow of the door, while Hereward, like a mad Berserker, hurled his weight at it and drave it from its hinges.

"A tune in a sharp mode," quoth he to the jester and drave the great sword through his navel. Then springing

"The desperate situation was, for the time, forgotten" 172

on the new lord he cried in a high ringing voice, "I never show in daylight but the Night hath come." With that he clove him to the chin.

So quickly were these slain that the Normans, stupid with drink, had not raised a hand against him, but now they seized knives, plates, forks, anything they could, and fought like beasts at bay. Never in all his life of fighting did Hereward feel so much exaltation and pleasure as in this affray. He hewed the Normans down one by one if they stood their ground. If they fled, he pursued them to the wall and ran them through, laughing with joy as he did so. Not for a second did he stay from hewing and slashing until he alone stood alive in the hall. Without, no man had passed Martin. Those who had gained the door he had brained one by one, unseen of any. Then did Hereward, drunk with blood and fury, seize a great gold goblet and catch therein the blood that poured from table to floor.

"Now," he cried, "like Cerdic I give this drinc-hael to my foes in their own blood!"

But the goblet dropped from his hand as, looking aloft, he caught sight of a veiled, cloaked form in the gallery above. Dropping on his knees, "I give thanks," said he simply, "to the Giver of all grace that the blood of my brother is avenged."

Hereward rose to his feet in humbler mood, his spirit somewhat subdued, and went in search of his lady mother. He found her in her bower, and in the joy of their reunion the desperate situation was, for the time, forgotten by both. But the spirit of the Lady of Coventry, less self-reliant than that of Godwin's widow, seemed utterly crushed by the misery she had undergone. She swayed to and fro in the mighty arms that held her, ever turning her head to where a form, covered with a dark cloth, lay

on a pallet 'neath the wicket window. At last Hereward persuaded her to retire to rest, and the moment she had gone he brought poor Godwin's head and placed it beneath the cloth. Then he passed down to the hall, through the doorway of which he could now see the townsfolk clustered on the outworks and staring excitedly at the scene of the grim struggle.

Presently a little band led by Geri approached and Hereward, sword in hand, met them at the door. Leofric fell on his knee and the others followed. As they did so, Hereward pointed his blade at the shambles within.

"The French like Bourne so well, friends, that they have decided to stay here for life. Did I not tell you yestereve that they were fey?"

The crowd on the outworks now came with a rush and surrounded the little group. Each new arrival forced his way to Hereward's feet and, falling on his knees, kissed his lord's hand and swore to be true man to him for ever. Then cheer after cheer went ringing around the old Roman camp in which the hall stood, scaring the birds from the trees in the outer fringe of the forest to the west. Straight above Hereward's head a great eagle poised motionless on silent pinions. His eye was quick to perceive it and pointing to the black speck in the blue heavens, he cried in a great voice:

"See the earn is come to welcome me home. Right well does he know who giveth him his meat! Ay," he went on, gazing at the bird, "I will gorge thee, thou dewy-feathered, horny-nibbed, dusky-coated fowl. Go, bid thy friends the lank wolf of the wood and the wan raven, slaughter-greedy, to the banquet. Eno' will there be for all of ye and so shall we have all the Valkyrs to gorge and bloat themselves on the carrion of these mongrel French, these bastard Northmen!"

This savage pagan speech seemed to awe even the hardened men before him into silence. But Leofric, the scop, with the old light in his eyes, struck his harp and sang:

"Sorrowful Saxons,
Shamed by the foeman,
Friendless we fared,
Reft of our right lord;
Reckless the reaver
Slew him unsinning;
Weaving the web
Worketh Wyrd ever watchful;
Came then our champion
Cleaving the swan's bath,
Cleft he the churlish
Cursed child-queller,
Gladdened the grey beast,
The wolf of the weald,
Swift the wan raven
Sped to the sword-slain,
Drear flew the dew-feathered
Earn, the dusk-coated,
Loud laughed the warhawk
War-lay, a greedy.
Drinc hael to Hereward!
Health to our high lord
Home in his hall!"

Then after the chorus of applause had subsided Hereward addressed the folk:

"Why stand ye here, men of Bourne?" said he. "There are French enow yet treading Anglia's soil to keep your axes busy. Arm! arm! An ye waver ye are lost. Strike quickly and our land may yet be free. Fall on the French around you, ambush them, give quarter to none save to those who can buy their lives with great treasure. An ye love the Leofricssons avenge their widowed mother, deprived already of her youngest boy. To-day I take her to Croyland, that she may be beyond

the reach of these French wolves. And then I must leave you— What! faint-hearted already? Think ye that I alone can wipe out the Normans? Forty-nine of the bravest of you, well armed, shall guard Bourne, For myself I shall call upon a few Norman neighbours ere I go back to Flanders. When ye see my farms of Toft, Manthorpe and Witham-on-the-Hill ablaze at once in a single night, ye shall know full surely that I have returned to England for good and have kindled the torch of war. Then arm yourselves and come hither. Geri, my cousin, shall lead you while I am away and he will ward my farms."

After these words he took the Lady Godiva, Winter, his brother-in-arms, and Gwenoch and they rowed away for Croyland, taking with them the body of the boy Godwin. And the sun, glinting on the golden head of the brave lad who had died in defending his mother from insult, shone also on the evil faces of his murderers grinning in ghastly row from the gable spikes of Bourne Hall, a menace to all Normans in Kesteven.

There at Croyland, Ulfketyl the abbot and his black-robed monks buried Godwin. And there, away from the world of bloodshed, pillage and rapine, Godiva, his mother, buried herself. And Hereward with Winter and Gwenoch rode the nine miles that divided the famous monasteries of Croyland and Peterborough.

When he stood in the presence of the noble abbot, now very weak and tottering to his grave, the old priest greeted his nephew with joy. Brand, with true patriotic spirit, had refused to acknowledge William as king, and he had asked Edgar the Ætheling's confirmation of the choice of the monks of Peterborough, when Leofric, their former lord, had returned from Hastings, wounded to death.

Wherefore William meditated Brand's arrest, but in daily expectation of a summons to the court of the Highest, Brand did not hesitate to further offend the Norman, and he was willing to grant the request his famous nephew had come to Peterborough to prefer that day.

For Hereward had bethought him that, despite his refusal of numerous offers from foreign nobles to confer upon him the honour of knighthood, the lack of this dignity might somewhat stand in his way as leader of the English people, among whom would be many of noble rank. Wherefore he requested Brand to knight his two comrades, Winter and Gwenoch, and himself, the more as he had heard that the French despised and refused to recognise knighthoods conferred by monks.

The abbot listened graciously to his nephew's plea and directed that their bare swords should be laid upon the altar at High Mass and that they should pass the night in prayer and meditation, watching their weapons. It was the eve of the Feast of the Nativity of St. Peter and St. Paul, and on the following day, the three should receive their weapons again from Wilton of Ely, the monk who would celebrate High Mass.

So it came to pass that, after the long night had been spent in confession and prayer, Abbot Brand laid the bare blade on Hereward's neck with his benediction, while Wilton of Ely performed the same office for Winter and Gwenoch. Then the holy mysteries were communicated to them and thus were those three knighted after the English fashion.

At Hereward's command, one of the monks, a skilful limner, charged his shield with the German eagle for Leofric, borne on a bend gules, and the good abbot sent the new knights away with tears and blessings.

Thereafter Hereward always insisted that each of his men who had deserved that honour should be knighted by a monk, and while he held Ely that was always the custom. Before and even after the last stronghold of English liberty had fallen to the Norman he would have monk-made knights, saying:

"If any man has received his sword from a servant of God and from a soldier of the kingdom of Heaven that man manifests his valour excellently in every kind of warfare, as I have often found by experience."

Returning to his own people he heard that Frederic Warrenne, brother of the old Earl William de Warrenne, had sworn either to place his head where he had set those of the Normans or to deliver him up to William for punishment. To that end Frederic had gathered a force at King's Lynn. This was enough for Hereward and he resolved to return to Flanders by way of Lynn. He sent his challenge to Warrenne, but it was promptly refused on the ground that the Saxon was no knight. Wherefore, having little time to waste, Hereward entered the inn where Warrenne was seated in the midst of his men and, despite their resistance, dragged him forth into the street. There he forced him to fight while the townsfolk, aroused by the uproar, held the Normans in check.

Hereward and Martin stood on the deck of their wave-floater as it sailed out of the port on its way to Boston, and the death-bell's dread tone smote on their ears, tolling from the ancient church of Lynn above their heads.

"There sounds the knell of Frederic Warrenne," quoth Hereward. "May all the French robber knights soon claim a like due."

"Ay, master," answered Martin, who had grown yet

more strange in his ways of late; "I wonder how his soul fares. You have given the black de'ils work enow since we came to England."

"I'll find them more when I return," said his master

"He! he!" laughed Martin in ghostly wise. "Maybe you'll furnish them with more one day."

"Keep that helm straight, fool," answered Hereward curtly. "Look where you steer or Ran will have us both."

In Boston they picked up their crew, and faring from the old town ere a few days had sped they made Flanders once more without difficulty.

Then, by desire of Baldwin, Hereward rode to meet the Viscount of Pinkney in an assault-at-arms which had been arranged. Many valiant knights on both sides took part in this tourney and the two Siwards and Baldwin won great praise, even from their foes.

As for Hereward, he pressed impetuously far into the ranks of his foes and being at length unhorsed he was in great danger. Several knights made desperate efforts to capture him but he laid about him with such terrific strokes that no fewer than seven paid for their rashness with their lives.

Meantime Baldwin with the Siwards made several furious charges but each time was beaten back. Hereward began to fear that the contest was hopeless and, in his desperation, he slew two of his opponents by crushing them in his arms. His strength seemed to be more than human, and when at last his foes succeeded in disarming him, and he was well-nigh overcome, several of the knights were so filled with admiration of his prowess that they came to his assistance, crying: "Shame, shame! What honour shall we gain by overcoming a single gallant foe? Rescue for Sir Hereward, lest he win for himself all the honour of the joust. We shall but

soil our escutcheons in such a triumph over a single man!"

In the confusion which ensued Siward the White succeeded in reaching his master's side, aided him to remount his steed and the two men broke through the ring of knights and rode back to their party. Hereward told Baldwin of the chivalrous conduct of the viscount's followers, and the incident produced such good-will among the knights of each side that they stayed the encounter and made peace. All joined in praise of Hereward and loaded him with rewards of great price. Never, declared the Flemish knights, had they seen by land or sea so terrible a fighter as Baldwin's Englishman.

And when Baldwin was forming his party to ride back to St. Omer, the viscount's knights drew up in line on either side. As Hereward rode past, each man gravely saluted him, lowering his lance-point as he did so.

So courteous were the combatants in the early days of chivalry!

CHAPTER XIII

HOW KNUT'S NEPHEW DEALT WITH ENGLAND

> By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.
>
> SHAKSPERE.

SO Hereward remained in Flanders awaiting the great preparations which Swegen, King of Denmark —urged thereto, most probably, by his aunt Githa and also perhaps by Earl Tostig's widow, the Countess Judith—was making to regain the throne of England for the line of Knut the Great.

From England news came in plenty. For Matilda, Queen of England, was daughter of Baldwin and sister of Judith. The tidings of the capture of Durham and York by Gospatric and Edgar Ætheling with the Northumbrians was hailed with joy by Hereward's Danish men-at-arms, in spite of the error made by Gospatric in proclaiming Edgar king. But Hereward was filled with wrath at the folly of this, for it was not likely that the prudent Swegen would spend Danish men and Danish money in restoring the line of Cerdic to England's throne. Then came tidings of dire reverse. William had fallen on the English at York and had driven them forth. Besides plundering and burning the town he had laid

waste the whole shire, and forced the Ætheling and Gospatric to retire north.

At last the fleet of Great Knut's nephew was ready, and tidings were brought to Hereward that it had been sighted from the Flemish shore. Hereward at once took ship for England with Torfrida, her little namesake, now grown into a lovely girl, and the house-ceorls, and joined the Danish fleet off the south-east coast of England.

There he found that Swegen had entrusted the command to Asbiorn, his brother, and he found, too, that Asbiorn was anything but a capable chief. The Danish jarl tried in succession Dover, Sandwich and Ipswich, but was repulsed at each port with much loss of men and time. William had built a strong keep at most of the eastern ports and had rendered them almost impregnable. Yet still Asbiorn, proud and obstinate, was bent on landing at Yarmouth to attack Norwich. Whereupon Hereward, furious with rage, left the Danes at Yarmouth, exhorting the jarl to sail for the Wash with all possible speed while he proceeded to raise the fen men, with whom he would march to meet the Danes as soon as they should effect a landing.

So in this wise Hereward came again to his own lands, first sending on spies to view the country. But all the Normans had left to join their king at his wars in Northumbria, and not one had dared to approach the Hall of Bourne. That ghastly row of heads on the gable spikes had been enough to warn them off, and peace reigned for the nonce.

So Hereward set fire to the three farms, Manthorpe, Toft and Witham-on-the-Hill. And men flocked to his eagle standard. He also split up the war-arrow and sent it speeding to the neighbouring towns, to Boston, to Spalding, to Stamford, to Holbeach.

The comrades of his early years were quick to obey the summons : Winter, Geri, Gwenoch and Leofric, now a deacon at Croyland, Duti and Outi, the twins, in years, in likeness to each other and in fame in arms, Godric of Corby, Wulfric the Heron, so called because, being at Wrokesham Bridge, he had rescued four men doomed by Ivo Taillebois to be hanged for fishing in the meres and ponds around ; Wluncus the Black, who had once stained his face with charcoal and, coming unawares among the Normans, had slain ten with his single spear. All these hastened to Hereward, and with them came Leofwin, called the Sickle, because he had once routed twenty ceorls who had set upon him with spears and pitch-forks as he was mowing alone in a meadow. Dashing among them as if he were reaping he had killed and wounded many and put the rest to flight. With Ranald of Ramsey, who became Hereward's standard-bearer, came Utlag (the Outlaw), afterward his cook, Liveret, a famous warrior, and Leofwin Prat, that is, the crafty, which name he had won from his "praet" or craft, having many times broken prison, often killing his warders before departing. Others, too many to name, gathered round Hereward's banner, bringing their house-ceorls with them, so that at last he found himself at the head of a considerable force.

While awaiting the arrival of the Danish ships, Hereward spent his time in drilling the men in the methods of warfare used by the French, and here his long experience in Flanders stood him in good stead, so that, day by day, his small army became more and more efficient. Torfrida, in the words of the old chronicle, "quite overcame all womanly softness and proved herself helpful to her famous husband in his every need."

Meanwhile, although his force increased almost daily,

Hereward was ill at ease. There were no tidings of the Danes. What was to be done?

During this time, the fate of England, unknown to Hereward and his brave band, was being decided. It was the year 1069, the year in which the conquest of England was truly achieved. Three great attempts were being made to free the land from the Norman duke.

Edric the Wild, or the Forester, that strong and active chieftain with whom Hereward, many years before, had striven so hard in the wrestling contest at Chester, was there now at the head of his Welsh. He had allied with the Welsh kings Bleddyn and Rhiwallon, and had with him Earl Edwin and King Harold's widow, the fair Aldyth.

Round Stafford, Morcar had raised his standard. Gospatric, Waltheof and Marleswegen were north at Durham, threatening York. In Kesteven, Hereward was at the head of an army and the great fleet of Asbiorn, Swegen's brother, was in Humber mouth.

For Asbiorn, as Hereward to his rage and grief now learnt, had been thoroughly beaten at Norwich by Ralph Guader and his Normans. The French had easily held the castle and then sallying forth had driven the Danes, with much loss, to their ships. Whereupon Asbiorn re-embarked and made the mouth of the Humber.

Thence marching inland, the Danish jarl joined strength with Waltheof Siwardsson and Gospatric and marched on York. The Norman chatelain left there by William was a noble knight, William Malet, he who had buried the body of England's king at Hastings. He had with him Ealdred the Archbishop and a strong force of Normans. Confident in his great walls he sent word to William that York could hold out for a year. But

the townsfolk, to a man, were for the allies. They opened the city gates and once more York sank in blood and flames, for Malet fired the houses near the castle. The noble young Waltheof, son of the famous Siward of Northumbria, won himself undying fame by holding one of the gates against the whole Norman army seeking to break forth. With his mighty axe, the son of Siward slew a score of the enemy, while from the unburnt houses the Danes, admitted by the townsfolk, poured a rain of missiles on the French struggling in the streets. These were soon destroyed and the keep alone remained to the French. Then Malet fled with his wife and children, and York was Edgar's once more. The Archbishop Ealdred had died of sorrow ere the English army arrived. The allies did not seek to hold the captured city. The English again dispersed and the Danes took to their ships once more.

William sent his brother Robert north-east into Lincolnshire to watch the Danes, while he himself gave battle to Morcar at Stafford and routed him. Thence marching unhindered to York he laid waste the whole of the shire, literally burning the land black. He kept Yule at York and in January 1070 marched on Durham, compelling the submission of Waltheof and Gospatric. William gave his daughter Judith in marriage to the former, and Gospatric he restored to his earldom. Then, having laid waste all the land around Durham, the Norman marched back to York. Chester, the ancient seat of Earl Leofric, still defied him, and amid terrible hardships, the great king himself often journeying on foot to encourage his men, the Norman army marched in February from York to Chester, and the last great English city fell. Edric and Edwin were driven into the passes of the Welsh mountains, and after strengthening Chester

William marched south to Salisbury, king in fact as well as in name.

The Conqueror now rewarded his knights and men-at-arms with the lands of the vanquished English and proceeded to establish Normans in the bishoprics and abbeys of England. The famous scholar Lanfranc of Pavia became Archbishop of Canterbury in Stigand's room. Ealdred of York was dead and Thomas, a Norman of Bayeux, took his place. In Stigand's bishopric of Winchester, Walkelin, another Norman, was set, and the only English bishop left in possession was St. Wulfstan of Worcester.

Now among William's Norman priests there was one who, by reason of his turbulence and love of fighting, was chosen by his king to take Abbot Brand's place at Peterborough. Thorold was his name, and he seems to have been a sort of second Odo. He was the author of the famous *Chanson de Roland*, the national epic of France, and the king bethought him that Hereward would give this combative abbot enough to do.

When Hereward found that the Danes did not come he determined to retire into Ely, where already the Abbot Thurstan was holding out against the Norman power. With him were several famous warriors, one Earl Tostig, and Siward Barn; and having heard of Hereward's prowess, the abbot had sent bodes to him, begging him to come to Ely as chieftain of the defence. Earl William Warrenne learned that Hereward had embarked at Bardney, and thinking to avenge his brother Frederic, he laid traps for the Saxons on the banks of the Ouse. But in a brush between some of Hereward's party and the Normans, a few of the latter were taken and from them Hereward learnt the earl's plans. Accordingly a small force was stationed at a point which the earl

was to pass, and when the Normans appeared, Hereward went to the bank of the river with three knights and four archers. Warrenne sought to bribe the Saxons to betray their leader and was told that Hereward was with them.

"Swim the river, *hommes d'armes*, and bring the scoundrel hither," shouted he furiously. "He slew my brother, and a hundred silver marks will I give to the man who takes him!"

The Normans looked at the armed men upon the other bank and hesitated, as well they might.

"'Tis to no purpose, lord," said one old knight, "we should reach the other bank only to be knocked on the head as we strove to climb to land." Which was indeed likely enough, but his lord answered with a string of curses.

"Cowardly dogs," cried he, "do my bidding or, *par le splendeur Dex*" (this was King William's oath) "hanged for traitors shall you all be when we reach home."

"Nay, nay, fair sir," said an archer of the band, "this is just what they are hoping and fools should we be to run our heads against yonder bank."

At this moment Hereward stepped forth from his men. "What wouldst thou, Earl Warrenne?" he asked. "I am that Hereward thy brother so much wished to see. But methinks our meeting pleased him not greatly, for, in sooth, he hath fled the country to a land where the climate, an we may believe the monks, is more settled and somewhat warmer."

"Thou insolent ruffian," roared the old earl, black in the face with anger. "An I but had thee here, thou accursed stabber, thou fiend, I would so torture thee that——"

"Why thou wicked old landgrabber," quoth Hereward, laughing, "thou aged knave, thou ancient coffer of vices,

an I were with thee thou wouldst soon wish me further. Thy hands are too weak, thou crime-spotted shrew, to hold such big game."

"Cross the stream, villain," cried Earl Warrenne in terrible anger.

"Nay, nay, thou must come to me," answered Hereward. "I went to thy brother at Lynn; 'tis thy turn to visit me. But thou darest not come, so take instead my greeting. May it speed thee swift to Hela's realms."

Snatching a bow from the man next him, Hereward leaned forward a little and, notching a shaft, drew it until the barb was level with the yew. Before the earl could back his horse the grey goose shaft, winged by the Englishman's mighty arm, struck him full upon the chest, and bounded back from his splendid Milan hauberk. Yet so great was the force of the impact that Warrenne was flung senseless to the ground.

At Ely, Hereward was welcomed with the greatest honour, not only by Abbot Thurstan, Earl Tostig and Siward Barn, that famous chief, but also by his own nephews, the handsome young Earls Edwin and Morcar, who, tired at last of awaiting the deferred fulfilment of William's promises, had staked everything upon this last bid for freedom. All agreed that Hereward, though no earl, was the one chief whose ability might be matched against that of the great Norman.

Hereward soon learnt the sad story of William's campaigns in the north and in Wales and, before the Normans turned their attention to Ely, he sent to Edric the Wild a certain shield, whereon was depicted King Arthur and his knights, seated at the Round Table.

Better news was on the wing. Jarl Asbiorn and his Danes appeared at Ely. Full lustily would they fight, but Asbiorn told Hereward that his men must be paid

for serving the English, and Hereward having recently heard of the death of his uncle Brand and of the coming of Thorold of Malmesbury resolved to make use of the wealth of Peterborough. "Better that the Dane should have it than the Norman," thought he. So he promised Asbiorn plunder enough and sailed up the Nene, the Danish fleet following in his wake. Greatly he feared that they would sack Croyland as their forefathers had done in times of yore. But that, he swore, should never happen again.

The monks of Peterborough, hearing that the Danes would spoil their monastery, despatched a church-warden named Ywar post-haste to the Norman abbot, begging him to come to their aid, and Thorold had got as near as Stamford town when the Viking fleet appeared.

On the fourth day of the Nones of June, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has it, the gates of the great abbey were beset by thousands of wild warriors, not only Danes, but Swedes, Norwegians, Finns and men from every shore of the Baltic Sea.

The gates were strong and the defences sound, so they could not make entry there. At last Hereward, after imploring the monks again and again to admit the Danes and save useless bloodshed, got angry and bade them set fire to the monastery at the Bulldyke gate.

Then the horde swarmed in and would assuredly have slain all the monks had not Hereward with his knights and men-at-arms helped them to escape into the woods around. Naught else was saved that day. From end to end the noble monastery was pillaged. Climbing up the Holy Rood the savages tore the golden crown from the head of the sacred Image and the golden footstool from beneath its feet. Two gilt and nine silver shrines did they seize, and fifteen huge crosses of gold and silver.

So much treasure in coins, robes and books, and in gold and silver plate, took they that "no man can compute the amount." By this time the fire had seized upon the houses of the monks and those of the townsfolk, and all were destroyed save only the infirmary of the monastery.

A sick monk named Leofwin the Long lay there and him Hereward valiantly saved from death. Meanwhile the Danes were raging here and there in search of the furniture of the altar, which could not be found.

Hereward cast about in his mind, wondering where it might be hid. Then he remembered the steeple. "Follow me," he roared to the Danes, and rushed up the narrow staircase. There in a secret recess they found the splendid altar-cloth and countless wealth besides.

Such a fight as now ensued for possession of these choice treasures almost baffles description. Tearing and biting like wild beasts, the savage northmen struggled furiously, till the heat became so dreadful with the crowding and the flames that it seemed that all must perish. With shouts, curses, prayers and blows, the two leaders, Asbiorn and Hereward, at last got their followers to realise their danger and each, seizing what he could, rolled down the ladder to the floor below. Asbiorn, with his Danish guard aided by Hereward and the English, found it a hard matter to get the wild northmen on the ships, and right glad were they when this was safely accomplished.

In such sad wise was the richest of English abbeys, the Burgh of St. Peter, ruined and burnt in a single day.

The Danes sailed back to Ely, but Hereward resolved to proceed to Stamford, where he had hopes of a meeting with Thorold. The hour was late when they left Peterborough, so Hereward decided to rest that night at the nearest hamlet. He laid himself down on a sedge-strewn floor

among the sleeping forms of his house-ceorls, and a strange thing befel. It seemed to him that a bleak light wavered and flickered around the room. It grew stronger and stronger and seemed at last to focus itself at a certain point. As Hereward stared in wonder the shadows vanished before the brilliancy and he could just distinguish the outlined shape of an old man of terrible aspect, clad in garments of dazzling brightness, who menaced him with a great key which he held in his hand, threatening him with a wretched death on the morrow and perdition thereafter if he failed to restore the treasures he had taken from the Church. On awakening, Hereward, stricken with fearful reverence, returned with all speed to Burgh and there gave back all that the English had taken from the monastery. Then at a late hour he set out once more for Stamford.

Night set in and Hereward and his followers were wrapped in a fen mist which had been overhanging throughout the day and which now became so dense that the darkness could almost be felt. To add to their troubles a terrific storm arose, and though nearly every man there knew the land right well, they were beaten out of all reckoning. Some began to murmur that St. Peter was a-wreaking his desecrated shrine, and strangely indeed did the words sound in Hereward's ear, after the weird vision he had seen the former night. He took comfort, however, from the thought that he had made as much reparation as in him lay. And it would appear that the saint thought so too, for when quite at their wits' end, one of the party pointed out what seemed to be a huge white dog. The animal approached with the utmost friendliness, gambolling around and fawning upon the men for caresses. Suddenly he set off along the path in front.

"He must have come from some village," quoth

Hereward. "Follow him, men. In good sooth we can do no worse than we are doing."

So following the animal they soon emerged from the by-track and they knew the way before them. Suddenly a startled cry broke from one of the men. "Look, the spears!" Staring upwards each one saw a flame attached to his spearhead.

Flickering and wavering were the lights, now seeming to fade, and then again shining with fresh brightness. Like to those *candelæ nympharum* (nymphs' candles) which the dwellers-in-land call pixy-lights or wills-o'-the-wisp were they. No man could tear them off or put them out or throw them away. So, greatly wondering, they continued on their road until dawn, when they came where they would, beyond Stamford town. There the flames went out and their guide, a great white wolf as all could now see, turned back into the forest. Marvelling at the great wonder they had seen, they all, on the spot, gave thanks to God for their safe arrival.

Three days later Hereward gathered his men and returned to Ely. And there they learnt to their great joy that Knut's nephew himself had arrived in Humber mouth with another great Danish fleet. He lay there awaiting bodes from Ely with the proposals of the leaders of the Camp of Refuge, as Hereward had named this last stronghold of English freedom. So after a moot had been held it was decided that Hereward should go to Swegen with full powers to promise him the swords of all true Englishmen whom they in Ely could in any way control, to win for him the crown of his uncle, Knut the Great.

A royal figure made the King of Denmark. Stately and majestic was his mien and he was splendidly arrayed in robes of crimson lined with ermine, fastened at the breast

of his white tunic with a great brooch in the form of a snake of emeralds. He had long golden hair and well-formed features, but his comely face was lighted by eyes of a cold, steely blue, whose usually mild expression was broken at intervals by flashes which, like summer lightning, compelled the gaze of all beholders. He greeted Hereward graciously as the latter, stepping on board the royal wavefarer, knelt at his feet.

"All hail, noble knight," said Swegen. "Thou art come to us doubtless as the bode of our allies of Ely? Arise! What art thou called?"

"Hereward Leofricsson is my name, lord king, and I bear the bode of the chieftains in Ely unto your Majesty. Asbiorn's Danes are paid from the gold of Peterborough and we now await the royal pleasure. Let loose the sword-wolves, O king! Of a truth, full fain am I to lead the pack!"

"Well known to us is thy name and fame, Hereward, thou prince of knights. We doubt thee nothing. But Englishmen are not all like thee, the more pity. Our bodes say that Gospatric and Waltheof, the jarls, proclaimed Edgar Ætheling king when York fell to our Danes and the English."

"I deny it not, sire. Would that I might," answered the Saxon. "But the rede was not from us. There is not an Anglo-Dane in Mercia but would rather see Knut's nephew crowned than any Ætheling of Cerdic's line."

"That is well," answered the prudent monarch, "but is Mercia alone to meet William?"

"Yea and thrice yea, sir king—with you to lead!" answered Hereward proudly. "The very name of Knut, king of kings, were enow to drive these French into the sea!"

"But a much smaller man than Knut am I," said the

king, "yea, far short of him do I fall. Moreover, I hear that much of Mercia is under Waltheof's rule. And he is now William's man."

"True, lord king," answered Hereward. "Natheless right willing are we to give our lives in your cause."

"Nay, nay, thou true knight," replied Swegen. "The English have already two kings, William the Norman, king by might, and Edgar the Ætheling, king by right, and both have been proclaimed."

Hereward saw that further speech was useless, so he merely asked:

"Is that the last word, lord king?"

"It is, in good sooth, brave Hereward. Thou wert best come to Denmark with us and Swegen will make thee chief of his own guard."

Hereward stood thinking deeply. The Northland had always had a great charm for him and he felt that here would be the chance of lordship and honour, and as for fighting, who were keener at the play of the ash-spears than the Vikingssons? He felt, too, the dire hopelessness of the task to which he had set his hand. William was master of all England, save only of those fens and marshes around St. Etheldreda's holy isle. And now, too, the Danes were going. Ah, yes! he would take the king's good offer and serve the Lord of Denmark now that Harold, the Vikings' hero, had won his way to Valhalla's golden-ringed door. Swegen saw his face change and pressed his advantage.

"Then, Sir Hereward, what of thy lady and thy daughter? They will be safer with us than they are here, surrounded by these ravening Frenchmen. Thou must think of thy race and kin."

"Sire," replied Hereward, "your royal offer full well becomes so generous a prince, and far exceeds my deserts.

Ever have I longed to dwell and fight in the Northland. But shall a man shrink from his mother's side in the very hour of her utmost need? Surely my lady Torfrida would name me niddering did I flee. England calls me. In days of yore she thrust me out. But my punishment was earned and, lo! I have paid the wer-gild and my birth-land calls to her son. Here shall he remain and ere no longer England owns one spot of free soil, the Valkyrs shall choose him for Valhalla from heaps of her slaughtered foes."

The king smiled somewhat sadly, but a moment after his face cleared, and striking Hereward's broad back he cried:

"There spake the stoutest and truest of loyal hearts. Much I grieve that I gain thee not for my man, yet do I glory that Midgard boasts such a champion. Come, let us to the board and then thou shalt to Ely and bear my will to Asbiorn, my brother, that he join me at the Wash."

Over their wine, Swegen required a true story of Asbiorn's work in England before the royal fleet had arrived. And Hereward's soul burned within him as he remembered the part that the jarl had played in England's ruin and he gave the king the tale of Dover, Sandwich, Ipswich and Norwich.

"Ha!" said Swegen, "it shall go hard but he is outlawed in full Thing when we get back to Denmark."

And true enough, the Thing at its very next meeting drave Asbiorn, a wolf's head, from Denmark, to seek his fortune elsewhere, for that he had taken bribes from William the Norman, and had failed so signally to help the English. "'Tis a disgrace to the Raven banner," quoth Swegen, and the Thing agreed to a man.

Taking a warm leave of King Swegen, Hereward sailed

back to Ely, whence Asbiorn departed to join his lord, not forgetting to take the treasures of Peterborough with him. It did indeed appear that St. Peter could guard his own, and little wealth reached Denmark. For when the fleet had made the open sea, a mighty storm arose and scattered those ships wherein was the treasure, driving some to Norway, some to Iceland and some to Denmark. The altar furniture, some of the shrines and crosses, and the few other spoils which reached Denmark were not safe even there from the long arm of vengeance. For when the Danes had stored the treasure within a church at one of the king's towns, that very night through their drunken carelessness a fire broke out and the church was gutted.

Hereward gathered his chieftains to give the Danes good speed on their departure down the Ouse. He went back to the monastery with teeth set firm. The rest of that day was spent in building a wooden tower, afterward known as Hereward's fort, to render still stronger the already formidable natural defences of Ely.

"'Twill give the men a safe shelter wherefrom to shoot down the Normans," quoth he to Siward Barn. "And now let us in to a game of chess."

"Cheerly, English hearts," he cried aloud, as the men returned to their huts. "Bear in mind Alfred and Athelney! The wolves of war are hungry for their meat! If Knut's nephew be gone, a son of Penda is with you still!"

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE CAMP OF REFUGE

Blow wind! come wrack!
At least we'll die with harness on our back.
SHAKSPERE.

IN perilous case indeed were the defenders of Ely, for, in all England else, Wiliam was lord and master. Even Edric the Wild, or the Forester as the Normans called him, had at last become the king's man and had been given a good command in William's army; for the great Norman ever loved an open foe.

When William heard of the sack of Peterborough and the names of the English chieftains in Ely, he waxed very wrath. The presence there of nobles of such high rank as Edwin and Morcar gave the aspect of a national struggle to the war in Kesteven, for these young earls, in particular, were looked upon by the English as their natural leaders. Hitherto William had left Ely to those Norman barons to whom he had allotted lands in East Anglia, such as Ivo Taillebois, at Spalding, and Gilbert of Ghent, at Lincoln. But they had effected naught against the camp. Gilbert had enough to do in holding Lincoln, strongly fortified as it was, with its lofty castle, as a northern barrier against the Anglo-Danes, to cut them off from the North-umbrians. Hereward, as has been seen, had found Ivo and Thorold the abbot fighting enough and to spare

The case was serious for the whole cause of the Normans, although the Danes had gone, and a reverse at Ely might set England ablaze again. The master hand was needed.

So, gathering a great army, William moved deliberately towards the last free English stronghold. His men were eager to be loosed upon the camp, for their minds were inflamed by stories of the vast wealth of St. Etheldreda's Minster. The gold of Ely was already proverbial in the Norman army.

William halted his force at Cambridge and closed the south-western end of the fens with a great castle there, the mound whereof can be seen to this day. This was the base of his operations, and hence the great Norman approached the isle by way of Cottenham and then by Balsar's Hill, which he reached by a détour to the left. Thence, sending out scouts to left and right, he led the great army along the ancient causeway of St. Audrey towards Aldreth. This was, indeed, the only possible way of approach, the vast Smithy and Haddenham fens with the old West river running between them, stayed him from a more direct route. The isle was unapproachable from the west, while on the east the Cam and Ouse, flowing sluggishly through vast and dreary marshes, rendered an attempt from that direction most perilous.

Hereward had thus expected the Normans to take the obvious route by way of St. Audrey's Causeway and his army lay at Aldreth. William, marching along the bridleway, found his course stayed by a half-mile of fen, pitch-coloured and ominous. He ordered that the camp should be entrenched at Balsar's Hill and bade make a causeway to continue that of St. Audrey. But the stakes could not be firmly rooted in the slimy mire of the fen, and despite the great and tireless labour of the men who brought the

engines and siege-tools thither from the camp, the causeway when made seemed a shaky affair and it was questionable whether it was long enough. So they set to work to make a large raft with beams and tree-trunks bound together and with inflated sheep-skins tied beneath to support the weight of the men. This was placed beneath the causeway at the Ely end. Meanwhile Hereward bade raise a bank of turf in front of his wooden fort and concealed bowmen to right and left thereof.

"Fey are the foemen and fain of their fate, Siward," quoth he, watching the causeway, which seemed to quiver in its peaty bed. "The bridge is our best friend."

"Shall we not hurl our spears at these?" somewhat impatiently asked Siward Barn, pointing towards a few Normans who had advanced some distance along the causeway and seemed to be making signs to their comrades drawn up on the firm land.

"Nay," answered his chief. "Do naught to hinder them from the attempt. Check them not a whit. For our time will come."

The signs seemed fair, for the Saxons could see the army drawn up beyond advance in order to the very edge of the causeway.

Hereward's quick eye could detect the impatience of the Norman foot by the swaying of the long line at the causeway's edge. He laughed softly to himself and slapped his thigh.

"Cheerly, English hearts," he cried in ringing tones. "The eels for good Abbot Thurstan's table are fat eno' already but to-morrow ye shall have a royal feast of them!"

"Now, my men," cried William, advancing to cheer the onset, "strike your last blow for the honour of your king. Hereafter ye shall live in peace and plenty.

Countless wealth, ye know, lies yonder. Win me the island and your labours are ended. Advance steadily and in order. Cry '*Dex aie!*' and '*Notre Dame!*' *En avant!*"

With shouts and cheers the column of spearmen in their leathern jerkins, led on by a few knights, swarmed upon the causeway. Was it greed for the gold or fear for their footing that caused them to rush towards the raft in such frantic haste? On they rushed and as they came the causeway sank, at first almost imperceptibly, lower and yet lower in the water. Loud cries arose: "The gold of Ely!" "The treasures!" "On, on!" "*Dex aie!* and strike for King William!" "*Notre Dame!*" "The bridge sinks!" "Down with the rebels!"

"Now," roared Hereward, seeing that the causeway was packed from end to end. "Let them have it, bowmen. Shoot low." And with the words he drew his bow and sent a grey-winged shaft clean through the breastbone of the foremost knight, who was attempting to attach his scaling-ladder to the bank. The English cheered and a storm of shafts and spears made havoc in the massed ranks of their foes. Many who were not slain by the shafts were forced by the dead from the raft and the bridge into the black mud beneath. Into the mire they rolled with curses and shrieks and so choked up the space between the end of the raft and the Saxon works that one brave knight with a shout of "*A Deda! a Deda!*" sprang upon the bodies, and thence over the turf rampart.

A heartrending scream from the bridge turned all eyes towards the Normans. The causeway had yielded to the pressure. Over it rolled, bearing with it the brave stormers to be swallowed in the black abyss of thick slimy mud. A few at the southern end alone escaped,

"How now, my Deda?"

crawling through the mud and brackish water. In this first fight at Aldreth, William had lost thousands of his best warriors, and now, "groaning from deep grief of heart," he led the remnant of his army to Brandon, there to begin a strict blockade of the isle.

As for Sir Deda, after cutting down a Saxon and engaging Geri, he yielded his sword to Hereward. When asked why he had risked his life so recklessly, he informed his captor that the king had promised that the choicest treasures of Ely Minster should be given to him who first entered the isle and drew blood therein.

Whereon Deda was praised on all hands for his valour and daring, and well treated in Ely. But his liberty was not granted to him for several days, and then only on condition that he should say to his King William all that he had heard and seen. For he informed Hereward that he had often been told that the Saxons were poor warriors, knowing but little of warfare, but that what he had seen in the isle had convinced him of the falsity of these assertions, and he promised upon oath that the king should have only the truth.

Thus it came about that some twenty days after the disaster to the Norman arms, Sir Deda returned safe and sound to his king at Brandon. And William, in common with his court, was right fain of seeing him, for he had few knights more distinguished in deeds of arms.

"How now, my Deda," quoth the king, "thou wouldst seem to have fared better than most prisoners of war. How thou art alive at this hour passeth mine understanding. Why, man, Warrenne and Ivo have been filling mine ear with the most frightful tales of the ferocity of this Hereward and his thanes."

"Well, sire," answered the knight, "I can only say that he showed me no violence. He could not have treated

me more courteously had he been a French gentleman himself. There was never a day but I feasted with the chiefs at the high table and better fare would I never ask."

"How then?" asked William, "have they no lack of meat and drink? Methought to starve them by a close blockade. Be careful in thine account, sir knight, thou knowest well who hears thee."

"Ay, sire, right well, but my sovran knows he needeth not to doubt Deda. I pledge you my word, King William, that you may sit before Ely thus for ten years and more without reducing the isle in this way. The rivers teem with fish of every sort, pike, roach, burbot, perch, smelt and eel, all in innumerable quantity, and wild fowl swarm in the reeds fringing the morasses. It is the moulting-time now and I have seen men take a hundred, sometimes more than two hundred, sometimes nearly a thousand small birds from one lake. The woods are full of herons at this season of the year."

The Norman nobles around smiled somewhat incredulously at this account of the resources of Ely, but the king's face was serious. "What of the animals, Sir Deda?" he demanded.

"Truly, sir king, there again are they well supplied, answered the knight. "There are great herds of horned cattle, goats and deer, red and fallow, flocks of sheep, droves of swine, and for clothing the woods abound in fur-bearing creatures, the ermine, polecat, weasel and fox, while the otter is often taken in the waters. I have but spoken the truth, sire. It is not too much to say that a fatter and more fertile spot exists not in this savage kingdom."

The earls and knights standing to right and left of William's seat were grave as their king by this time.

"Now, sir knight," said the king, "give me as clear

and straightforward an account of the men as you have of their resources. I ask nothing better. Name me their chieftains."

"There are three earls in the isle," answered Deda, "Earls Edwin and Morcar and Earl Tostig. Edwin, formerly Earl of Mercia, is so handsome a youth that in five hundred of the fairest young men——"

"That will do," broke in William abruptly, for the subject of the ill-fated boy to whom he had promised a daughter, was a sore one with him. He really loved Edwin and, had it not been for the stern opposition of his chief nobles, would assuredly have kept his word. "Let me have the names of the others."

"Siward Barn and Orgar, Bishop Egelwin of Durham, Abbot Thurstan, Turkil and Hereward, who holds the chief command."

"Eh! well, what thought you of Hereward? Tell me of him. From the tales of his strength and ferocity I take it he is a giant in size and a demon in cruelty."

"Sire, I never saw a better or more courteous knight, either in France or in the Varanger Guard of the emperor at Constantinople. I should say that report has not exaggerated his strength, though he is but of the middle height, while as to his ferocity, your Majesty's informers have lied!"

A storm of angry words from Taillebois, Oger, Raoul de Dol, and Raoul Guader, greeted this speech, and Earl Warrenne cried bitterly:

"Of a truth thou hast been altogether hoodwinked by these knaves. How darest thou praise that ruffian and scoundrel to the king's face? I'll warrant they have bribed thee to induce the king to give them terms. Thou liest in thy throat!"

"I will maintain that which I say with my life, Earl

Warrenne," quoth Deda, drawing the gauntlet from his right hand. Several knights did the same and, had the king kept silence, would have flung them to the ground. But William broke in roughly.

"Hold your peace, all of ye," he roared. "Ye shall have enow of fighting here at Ely, without cutting each other's throats like so many fools. Can we not question one of our knights but he must be insulted right and left and in our presence too? Have more observance or, *par le splendeur Dex*, I will hang some of ye up as examples." And he concluded with a string of tremendous oaths which caused the churchmen, Odo and Thorold, among others, to glance in deprecating wise at each other.

"Now, Sir Deda, continue," said the king.

"Well, sire, Sir Hereward brought me in with courtesy and released me with honour. But he bound me with an oath to speak to your Majesty, without fear or favour, the whole truth and naught else. And I will keep my word."

"And thou shalt, by the Bread!" quoth William. "We have ever found thee honest true, and deem thou not that we could ever think otherwise of thee."

"I confess that one custom of theirs liked me but little. Every day in the refectory the monks dined with the knights, ay, and supped with them too. But little fasting suffices for an English monk, lord king. The abbot sate at the high table with the three earls, and Hereward and Turkil, seated side by side. On the wall above each knight and monk there hung shield and spear, while on the floor of the hall, from one end to the other, were set corselets and helms so that each man, monk as well as knight, was ever ready for a sudden call to arms."

"Dost thou mean that the monks are fighting men?" asked William.

"Yea, my lord, that are they, and as good, man for man, as the knights themselves," answered Sir Deda. "The like I never heard in any other place. And lastly, the isle is so fertile and so well guarded by swamps and morasses that it is much stronger than any walled castle. Howbeit, I trust my king will be pleased, since my tale is hard to believe, to continue the assault. Then will he find that I have told him no fable but the plain truth."

William was about to reply when a man-at-arms stepped forth and saluted.

"I crave leave to speak, your Majesty."

"Out with it, man!" thundered William. "Thou art one of the guard I set yestereven at the Rech-dyke, is it not so?"

"Ay, sire," answered the man, shaking with fear. "Would I had been anywhere else, in this world or the next, for what I have to say will anger your Majesty."

"Speak it," roared the king, striking the air with his fist, for he was, by now, in a furious temper. "If thou hast done aught amiss, or left aught undone, look to it, for thou shalt surely hang for the fault!"

"While on guard at the Rech-dyke I saw a boat with seven men therein, coming from the isle. All but two were monks, yet fully armed. And they plundered Burwell town and finally set fire to it."

"At which point ye all judged it prudent to retire, of course," sneered William. "Yet I set enough men at Burwell to have eaten any seven Saxons yet born."

"Sire, ten of us, led by Richard, Viscount Osbert's nephew, at once rushed to the assault, thinking to take them. The fleetest of our band caught them at the dyke, for indeed they went but slowly, but when within a spear's-throw, the Saxons charged upon Richard and

our comrades and before I could come up with more men-at-arms, every one of our men, save Richard, was dead or wounded. A warrior had engaged Richard apart and was trying to take him. They were fighting hard when a short Englishman, seeing us advancing, struck up the swords, saying that it was an unworthy thing for several men to attack one and that there was no time to decide the single combat. Whereat they retired, and as we pursued them to the edge of the fen we slew one with a spear and captured another. This man told us the rank and names of the seven. He who stayed the combat was Hereward, he who fought Richard was called Gwenoch, the others were five monks, Turstan, a young man, Boter of Saint Edmund's, Azer the Hardy, Siward and Leofric, the deacon, Hereward's minstrel. Sire, Sir Deda has told your Majesty of the monks of Ely naught but the truth."

"And a sad truth it is for me to hear," quoth William. "Save only Richard, ye are all disgraced. Given anything like equal numbers ye cause no more trouble to Hereward's men than so many boys might. Go!"

After the which he consulted his nobles as to offering terms to the defenders of Ely. Deda alone was in favour of this plan.

"If the isle were blockaded by four kings with their armies, the ploughman would not leave his plough, nor the reaper cease to glean his harvest, nor the hunter neglect the chase, nor the fowler his snares. Here numbers are of no avail, for they cannot be used," said he.

Which straightforward advice seemed good to the king though the hearing thereof displeased him not a little.

"Affairs in France are pressing, lieges," said he. "Normandy is menaced by the king and we think it

not wise to leave any enemy, let alone one so stout as this, behind our backs and in the middle of our kingdom. To us Sir Deda's advice seems sound. What think ye ? "

Then outspake Warrenne and many others, urging the continuance of operations against the isle

" If these go free and scatheless, sir king," cried old Earl Warrenne, his fury getting the upper hand of him, as indeed was often the case, " if you are the first to propose peace to them without receiving their most humble entreaty, how think you that others will view it ? Why all the English will jeer and mock at your authority and not one will be afraid to act as this scoundrel Hereward has done. The kingdom is yours save for this forsaken spot."

" Never yet," said Ivo Taillebois, " was it our king's policy to turn from an incompleted task. Will your Majesty trust me ? I verily believe that the rascal Saxon works by witchcraft, how else could he defy you even for an hour ? But let me bring an old woman I know of, who, by her spells, can strike such fear into the hearts of these English as will drive them from the isle without striking another blow."

Then all urged the king to take this counsel, saying that any one who could aid in crushing the foe was worthy of very great reward.

And strange as it is to tell, William was so perplexed by the situation that he thought it good to send for the old hag, but he ordered that she should be brought with all secrecy. So prone to superstition was that age that even the master mind of Europe could be brought to believe that the event of a battle or campaign could be influenced by sorcery. But he was, above all things, practical, and that night he personally watched the setting of guards at all points around the isle, lest any should

venture therefrom to try to learn his plans. Thus was the Isle of Ely placed under complete blockade. By land the king's forces beset it on all sides, by sea the king's fleet cut off all chance of escape in ships. But the English, flushed with victory, recked naught of this, and as for Hereward, though he saw further, he was too good a leader to say aught that might discourage his followers.

CHAPTER XV

A DOUGHTY DEED

Ye'll bury me 'twixt the brae and the burn, in a glen far away
Where I may hear the heathcock craw, and the great harts bray;
And gin my ghaist can walk, mither, I'll go glowering at the sky,
The livelong night on the black hill sides where the dun deer lie.
CHARLES KINGSLEY.

SO strict a blockade did William maintain that for some months it was a matter of very great difficulty and danger for any one to enter or quit the isle. What new plan was the Norman framing? Hereward called a moot of the nobles and knights and it was decided to send a spy into the camp of the foemen. But who should go?

"It falls to me, earls and knights," quoth Hereward at last. "None other can undertake the task. My knowledge of their tongue will serve me in good stead."

Torfrida turned a glance of piteous entreaty upon him and the moot, with one accord, urged him to send some other. But, self-reliant as ever, he refused and at last became somewhat angry.

"Am I chief here or no?" asked he. "Will ye never learn that I mean what I say?"

He was as obdurate to Torfrida's prayers and tears.

"Lady, I beg you, learn your place. 'Tis for the good of England's cause I go, and naught shall hinder me therein. Come, aid me to disguise."

Then did he cause Torfrida to cut his long golden locks

and beard, and having attired himself in the dirty and ragged clothes of a ceorl and placed Mare Swallow in a barge, he set out for Brandon.

To clear the Norman outposts he went south by a somewhat devious way, and crossing the river Lark moored his barge by a reedy bank and rode away north through Eriswell and the rabbit warrens.

He rode hard, but the sun was setting ere he sighted a small turf hut.

"I must stay here to-night," quoth he, and made his way towards it. Long ere he could reach the low toft whereon it was perched he came upon a ragged serf seated on the grass and devouring a hunk of bread. Beside him stood a sorry nag, laden with panniers wherein Hereward discovered pots, jars and jugs of earthenware all tied together by means of a string passed through the handles. The man glanced up at him from beneath his brows, with sullen suspicion, as he leapt from Mare Swallow.

"I have a liking for thy pots, fellow," quoth Hereward.

The man gave a low chuckle and continued to munch his bread. Hereward made a step towards the horse and this caused the fellow to leap to his feet, snatching as he did so a stout oaken cudgel from the grass.

"Wouldst like this too, master?" asked he, twirling the staff round his head. "What of her? A tight little rod she be, eh?"

"Best lay her down again, friend, and talk wisdom. Thy coat is none too good, but mine is e'en worse, and in such hard times as these, honest Englishmen should share and share alike. I will take thee half thy pots and thou shalt keep the rest."

"Thee'lt take me a broken head an thee comest a step nigher," growled the potter. A broad-shouldered knave

was he and seemed to promise a good fight. And Hereward, who felt lighthearted as a boy with the freedom of his ride among the breezy warrens, was inclined to prolong the argument for the pure fun of the thing. But time was pressing. He stepped towards the fellow and slipped by design upon the damp grass. The man sprang in at once with an ugly downward blow. Catching the wrist as the staff fell, the Saxon chief seized the left arm of the potter and swung him clean over his head. But he was on his feet again in an instant :

" I'll teach thee," he roared. " I be the best man in Swaffham at this game. Now thee hast it ! " And he sprang in again with another stout blow. Stepping nimbly to the left, Hereward dropped him with a shattering blow full on the forehead.

" Enow, enow, master," quoth the potter, opening, after a while, two slits of eyes. " Thee hits shrewdly hard. But the pots be all my living. Welladay, what be I to do for bread ? What will the good wife say to this ? "

" There is bread and ale for thee, knave," quoth Hereward, handing him two silver pennies. " Be thou thankful that thou livest to tell thy good wife of thy fight this day."

" He, he, thou art a merry dog," quoth the ceorl, gloating over the coins with evident glee. " Whole pennies is better than cracked crowns ! He, he, he ! " And he jerked his finger towards his own bleeding coxcomb.

Hereward untied the string that bound the pots.

" Well for thee that thy crown was not cracked to-day for the last time ! Thou wottest little with whom thou hast fought. Get thee gone lest I should take a sudden liking to thy nag. By the might of Thor, methinks I will have——"

With a howl the potter sprang on his horse and gave

it a kick, which had the effect of causing it to canter down the track far more briskly than was its wont. With a broad smile Hereward placed the pots on Swallow's back and led her towards the hut. With its turf walls and roof of thatch, a sorry affair it seemed. "The better for me, in this garb," thought Hereward, as, guided by a faint glimmer from within, he made his way up the side of the toft.

He knocked at the crazy old door. It opened, and glancing in he perceived that the hut was empty. A dim rush-light was burning on the ground and by its aid he got a glimpse of the furniture. This was scanty enough, a three-legged stool stood in one corner and on it lay a roll of parchment. On a bench were several withered bodies of frogs and snakes, with bottles and phials standing beside them. Glancing at the wall he saw, to his horror, several gruesome skulls nailed thereon. A vast stuffed horse's head formed the centre-piece and Hereward knew at once that the owner of the hut was an Odin worshipper. 'Twas not this, however, but the general appearance of the interior which made him devoutly cross himself.

"'Tis a witch's abode," he muttered, trying to call to mind where and when he had last seen a witch. Two great green eyes glowering in the semi-darkness caused him to recoil a step.

"Bah! you have no more heart than a boy, Hereward," quoth he to himself. "'Tis but a cat. Well, I must e'en make the best of this gear." Placing his crockery with great care on the floor he led Mare Swallow to a shed in the rear of the hut, and then, returning, gazed about for signs of meat and drink but saw none. His eye fell on the parchment and, carelessly picking it up, he sat down on a bed of rushes and tried to read it. The manuscript was evidently very old and in the Latin language, but,

strangely enough, two or three long passages in runic letters appeared here and there in the text. Now Hereward knew a little Latin, the result of those early years of schooling in the cloisters of Peterborough, and Martin had often taught him the values of the old runes, those mystic symbols, the first alphabet of the followers of the White Horse of Hengest, but which, long displaced by the Roman letters of the Irish monks, had come to be regarded by the Saxons as magical, full of sorcery and all manner of evil, as witness the sorry end they had brought some sixty year agone to the great champion of Iceland, even to Grettir the Strong. But Hereward's curiosity o'ercame his misgivings and he scanned the letters slowly. And lo! the first word he painfully spelt out was the name of the girl he had known in Gilbert's castle in Northumbria, Alftruda, the fair Wessex maiden, Alftruda, the Rose of England! And, like a flash, a scene passed across his mind. A youth victorious, his foot planted on the breast of a fallen foe; a lovely girl clinging in mortal dread to the young champion's arm; in front, and cursing her with all the vehemence of sin-hardened age, a frightful hag from whose withered face, puckered into a thousand lines of malignity, shone green cat's eyes of intensest hate. Hereward recalled her dire words, and he remembered the ring of triumph in them that had struck a certain chill even to the heart of the boy before her, though he had laughed in his careless swaggering manner in the very face of the old carline.

He laughed then. He did not laugh now, when a thin shadow spread over the doorway and the wan light shone on that shrunken visage again! If Hereward ever felt fear in his life it was now, when astride of the flood of memory came that spirit of evil again. She did not look at him but gazed at the stool in the corner. Ther

she cried in a shrill piping voice, "What! another wayfarer to ask shelter of the old woman! What wilt thou at this time o' night?"

"I would shelter for myself and my horse," answered Hereward, his stout heart returning at the sound of her voice. "Dost thou need any pots?"

"Nay, begone, poor fool serf," she answered. "Thou wottest little whither thou art come." Raising the rushlight she gazed into his face and lo! her own expression changed as she continued:

"Well, the night will be an evil one, ceorl, a very evil one, so thou shalt stay for three of thy pitchers, one for thyself, one for thy horse and a third for thy boldness. 'Tis but few would dare to thrust themselves in here."

"Ah well, mother, thou knowest the old adage, 'Needs must when the devil drives!'" quoth Hereward. "And thou art hospitable enow, I will warrant. Hast any bread and ale for a poor potter's fare?"

"Very fitting is the adage, son," answered the creature. "But as for food or drink there's naught here. Dost take this for an inn?"

"Nay, eye of Odin, I would not so wrong an English inn," answered Hereward.

"Thou canst not sleep here," said the old woman. "'Tis my bed. But get thee without and thou wilt find a ladder which leads to the loft. Go up thither and thou'lt find plenty of straw. There's a poor lad up there who came hither from St. Peter's after Hereward and the Danes had burnt the monastery. He has been trying to get into Ely ever since, why, Loki only knows, but he has poor chance of passing the king's blockade Thou canst sleep with him."

Hereward's ears tingled with joy at the words, for he

realised that this creature knew the state of affairs. "I may learn somewhat here," thought he.

He climbed the ladder which led to a small loft about half full of straw. It was too dark to see a yard in front of him, but he could hear some one breathing very fast, and listening intently he felt sure that his companion was not asleep but awake and very much frightened.

"Fear not, boy," said Hereward, speaking in the broad Mercian used by Lincolnshire theowes and serfs. "I am but a poor wayfarer taking shelter here from the storm." There was no answer for a while, during which the Saxon chief remained silent also. Then a voice that sounded strangely refined and familiar replied:

"Thanks to thee, comrade. I had feared that she was come at last. Oh, do not remain here, she will murder thee by her fiendish arts. Away with thee, into the storm, anywhere, but as thou lovest life, stay no longer."

"No such great liking have I for weather like this. And it seems that thou art not dead as yet."

As he spake a terrible and lasting lightning flash showed him a fair youthful face, which wore such an expression of terror as made Hereward feel somewhat uneasy. He stretched out his hand to pat the long golden locks of his companion in misfortune. "Tell me thy tale, young friend," said he gently.

"It is a relief to speak to any mortal," said the boy, shuddering as if with cold, though indeed they were warm enough in the straw. "I was seeking to reach Ely and coming to this hut late one night—I dared not proceed for fear of the marshes and the French outposts —I asked shelter here of this terrible woman, and she has kept me ever since, saying that in no wise can the French scouts be passed.'

"Kept thee?" queried Hereward. "I wot thou art free to go an thou likest. What, only an old woman to hinder thee! Thou art not a coward?"

"Yea, little have I of hardihood. But thou knowest naught of this witch, her cruel face, her strange threats and prophecies. At first I thought that she was hindering me for the sake of a few gold rings and coins I had, but most of these are gone and yet she keeps me. Once indeed I tried to escape but she and another hag dragged me back with awesome threats and swore to murder me if e'er I tried again."

"Why do they keep thee yet?" asked Hereward.

"I fear it is to gain some reward by betraying me to the Normans."

"Bah! how much would they give for one poor Saxon youth?"

"Ivo Taillebois would pay for the capture of any one seeking to gain the camp."

"And why dost thou wish to reach Ely?"

"Because I have a dear friend there and I would serve —Hereward."

The answer was given in a low voice and in a strangely hesitating manner. "Hereward has no use for men who dare not face an old woman," said he. "But right willingly would he be thy shelter and ward an thou couldst reach him."

He spoke somewhat roughly, for the boy's story moved him in a way for which he could not account. It was clear to Hereward from the lad's speech that he was of gentle birth. It was curious that when he spoke it was always in purest Wessex with no trace of any other dialect. However, though somewhat puzzled and therefore a little peevish, for ever he hated all things he could not understand, Hereward was drawn towards his young companion

by that secret sympathy which ever forms a bond of union between those in distress. The storm raged without, his young companion shuddered.

When they had lain awhile, but how long afterward Hereward knew not, the chieftain felt certain that, in the intervals of the thunder-claps, he could hear a step approaching from the trees in the rear of the hut. A slow feeble tread, pausing at times, but ever advancing again. Hearing the boy moan in his sleep, Hereward bent his head to catch some broken words he was muttering:

"Again—the two—she's ever worse then—when both— Oh, do not curse—me—anything—pay—yes."

"Hush, youngling," whispered Hereward. "I watch thee. All is well."

"I know——" was the answer.

The moon was shining now and the fair young face looked so hopelessly sad that Hereward stepped to his side and kissed the soft mouth. The boy's regular breathing was resumed, he was again sleeping peacefully.

"Ho, there are two of these old crows," thought Hereward as he heard the door of the hut open. "Of a truth watch them I must and will."

He crept down the ladder and searched around until the rush-light within showed him a chink between two planks of the door. There he crouched to listen. The witches were speaking in the French language.

"Is the weather foul, sister?" asked one cracked voice.

"It is foul, sister," came the harsh reply.

"Will the storm last, sister?"

"The storm will last."

"What gold gave the Angevin to thee, sister?"

"That is naught to thee. The little I got must pay me for the toil of the journey to-night. I am soaked and chilled to the bone."

" Ay, thou shalt divide with me or much more will I earn from the king with the tale of whom thou hast aloft. Ha, thou perceivest mine intent ! "

" Thou dost not know ! "

The other creature bent her head and whispered a word in her companion's ear.

" How didst thou learn, thou prying cat ? The foul fiend fly away with thee, thou greedy vulture."

" That is likely enough for both of ye," thought the watcher at the door.

" Surely a simple thing to see. A child would know."

" Whose horse hast thou in the yard ? " asked the other when her curses had subsided somewhat and after much wrangling she had satisfied her " sister " with one of the two bracelets she now drew forth.

" 'Tis only some potter's beast. I gave the fellow a bed in the straw for these pitchers. We need them as thou knowest."

" Ho, ho," chuckled the other hag, with a hideous leer. " He is in the loft. I see thy plan. If they escape together and the king gets to know ! He, he ! "

" Yea, I have waited for a chance of letting him find out through me where some one is ! "

" That spells gold, sister, thy plot is good."

" It spells Revenge, sister, and that is better."

" What didst thou tell Taillebois ? "

" That I would consult the warder of the well to learn the favourable day for the king's attack. I told him I would raise a storm to drive right into the faces of the English that they might be bewildered and unable to fight."

" But save to-night there has been only fair weather of late."

"Well do I know the signs of air, earth and sea, and I tell thee the storm will last."

"The attack will be delivered at Aldreth again, sister?"

"Ay, sister. Evil will be the fate of the Frenchmen. I dreamt to-night that I saw an earn of pure gold fly o'er the fen at Aldreth. Men were pursuing hotly and they heeded not the marsh. In they fell and lo! the banks were ablaze as with fire."

"'Tis the doom of the Norns. Many of the French are fey! He, he! But we have been paid!"

"Now then, not a sound. We will to the warder of the well and ask our questions, if so it may be that the lord of night will vouchsafe answer."

"Come then, but don't rouse the potter or the *boy* He, he!"

With a series of low chuckles the hags rose, and Hereward heard their feet shuffling among the rushes within. Quickly slipping round to the back of the hut he lay down behind the roots of an enormous oak-tree near a small spring that flowed eastward.

"Peter!" he muttered. "I shall surely be hagridden all my days for this. Be near me Holy Lady of Ely. I ward your shrines day and night!"

By this time the hags had reached the spring and Hereward was all attention. He heard them dropping pebbles into the well.

Presently they began to mutter spells and it struck a cold chill to his very heart to hear some strange voice replying.

Then joining hands the two vile creatures began to circle round the old stone basin. Faster and faster they went and a weird song arose, while all the time the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed around their heads

"Spirit of Evil, Lord of Night
Guide thou thy daughters to the right,
Ever thine earthborn slaves are we
To work thy will by land and sea.

"Master, pray tell us without guile,
When the fierce king shall take this isle;
Casting the pebbles in thy well;
Hearken, we pray thee, lord, our spell."

Hereward heard again the splash and gurgle of the pebbles as they fell in the water. Then was the chant renewed once more:

"Sister, mark the doom of Fate,
We have cast in pebbles eight;
Eight days hence the king shall land,
Dealing death to Hereward's band."

Hereward was minded to slay the two old ghouls there and then, but thinking that the king might take their rede, in which case he knew when to expect an attack, he slipped back to the loft and slept peacefully for several hours.

He was awakened by a light touch on his shoulder and looking up saw the boy standing at his side.

"You were best to go now, fair sir, before the crones are awake," said he.

"Hey!" quoth Hereward, "fine words to a poor potter."

"It is of no use trying to deceive me," said his companion. "Your every word and movement betrays your gentle birth, and the more clearly to one a great part of whose time, as evil fate would have it, has been spent in courts."

"He must be the son of some nobleman ruined by the Normans," thought Hereward. Then he said aloud: "And now surely thou art going with me. Thou wilt

"Then was the chant renewed once more" 220

stay no longer with these vile creatures. I go to Brandon to sell these pots of mine."

"Nay, nay, I dare not go with thee to Brandon. Fain would I find a path into Ely but the isle is too strictly guarded, I fear. Besides which, if I left this hut, *her* curse would rest upon me for ever," and the young Saxon pointed downward with a shudder.

"Bah!" ejaculated Hereward, "afraid of the old woman again. Cheerly, my son, I tell thee that I never yet came to evil through a witch's curse, so I reck little of them. Curses, like chicks, return to roost. See, I go down the ladder and in a moment my mare will be below. Then slip down, jump up behind me and we shall be able to laugh them to scorn."

By this time they could hear the old wives stirring within, and a cock from some clearing close at hand sang forth his shrill defiant call.

"Hearken lad," went on Hereward, "when that sound is heard ill spirits have no longer power over mortals." He ran down the ladder and presently reappeared with the great mare, ready saddled. But to let the witches keep his pots he had no mind. Watching them through a small hole in the turf wall, he had the satisfaction of seeing them both leave the hut by the door in its front. In one moment he was within and had seized the pots, by the next he was mounted with them slung before him. The lad came down the ladder and mounted behind.

"I will go with thee as far as the town," whispered he.

"Then thou goest under these bonds," quoth Hereward, laughing. "Thou shalt say naught of the events of yesternight, nor shalt thou leave me until we are safe in Ely."

And this he spake in full knowledge of the hindrance a young companion would probably prove in his perilous

undertaking. The weal of his people was his first thought, but he felt strangely drawn toward this youth and, with his usual self-confidence, still thought that no obstacle was too great for him to overcome.

"My mouth is sealed, but I may not come with thee to Ely," answered his companion. "There are reasons for my entering the isle alone, if at all."

For the first time Hereward eyed him with suspicion. Then he shook the reins and Swallow dashed around the hut, almost knocking down the two old women, who raised screams of anger as he shot by them.

"To our next merry meeting, fair dames," shouted he, waving his hand mockingly.

The crones could only reply with terrible curses, which were lost on the ears of Hereward and his companion as they raced along the road to the town.

Hereward halted the mare a short distance from Brandon and threw away the fragments of those pots which had been broken in the wild gallop. He was so occupied with this needful task that he did not notice the young Saxon glide off into the woods which bordered the roadside. When he looked round his erstwhile friend was gone.

This puzzled him not a little, but he had gone too far to think of turning back now. So he rode straight to the gateway of the court, secured his mare and wandered in, crying, "Pots, pots, good pots and jars, all best earthenware!" He was soon surrounded by scullions and cooks and brought into the kitchen.

There came in by chance a knight of the court. He stared at the potter and then cried aloud:

"Why, who in the fiend's name have we here? Never in my life have I seen one so like in face to that scoundrel Hereward! Come hither, ceorl, into the hall that the men-at-arms may see thee."

Thus was he brought into the hall among the nobles, knights and fighting men, and subjected to a close scrutiny.

Ivo Taillebois approached and stared at him for some few moments.

"Ha!" he cried at length, "what said the Lord de Brus? This ceorl like Hereward! 'Tis not in reason to imagine this dwarfed varlet fighting as we have known Hereward to fight! I would wager Anjou that this is not he!"

"Natheless, Ivo, de Brus has right," quoth Earl Warrenne. "I have seen Hereward and I tell you this man hath his very trick of face. Let Ascelin see him."

So he was brought to his old foe of the Poitiers tournament. But Ascelin laughed with Ivo at the very idea. For Hereward was acting his part to the life. Utterly fearless, he never doubted his success, and confidence, as always, proved the best of allies. So mean a sight did the potter present, with his soiled garments and terrified face, that most of the knights broke into bursts of laughter at the first glance at him.

"Ha!" cried Ivo, mockingly. "Is this the Paladin Hereward the Saxons boast to be a match for any seven of our knights?"

"Dost thou know Hereward, knave?" asked Warrenne through a Saxon menial.

"Ay, ay, I know him, lord, and to my cost. No man in Midgard hates him as I do."

"What, knave, but this will not do! Thou art Saxon, and all the English adore Hereward."

"Save those he hath robbed, noble earl. Two days agone he drave off a cow and four sheep of mine—all my living, lord, save these pots and the mare. All my living, my living, lord, a cow and four sheep, gentles. Sheep,

sheep, sheep. Ah, Sir Ivo, would that you would fight and slay him, you who are so mighty a man of war."

"Why dost thou single me?" asked Ivo.

"Because I have once heard him say that there is no man alive on ground with whom he would rather fight."

Ivo winced. Of all men on earth he feared the famous Saxon most.

"Take the fool away, knaves," quoth Warrenne. And once more was Hereward brought into the kitchen.

He went in cheerfully and was there well fed by the cooks and scullions who, having just prepared the king's luncheon, were about to sit down to their own. And there to his great joy he gained the knowledge he was seeking, that the next attack would be made from Aldreth on the eighth day as the witches had said. But he soon got far more attention than he wished, for the menials began to misuse him shamefully, as indeed was their custom whenever they had the chance of ill-treating an Englishman. Having given him as much ale and mead as he would drink, they began to cast about for means of annoying him. One fellow cried:

"'Tis right, comrades, that this dog of an Englishman should pay for his meat. Let us make him dance among his pots and see the smash!"

"Let us first pluck out the hairs of his head and beard," said another, and he laid hands on Hereward to carry out the plan. The Saxon pushed him off roughly and the fellow, getting spiteful, dealt him a hard blow.

Hereward returned the buffet beneath the knave's ear with a force that would have felled a bullock. The man dropped like a shot.

Then seizing the weapons nearest to hand, knives, forks, platters, anything, they all fell upon the Saxon at once. Breaking through their midst, Hereward snatched a

smouldering brand from the hearth and defended himself with spirit. One fellow, more impetuous than the rest, received a terrible blow that stretched him dead upon the floor. Dashing in upon the rest, Hereward drave them in utter rout to the door. But in flocked others from the courtyard and by sheer weight of numbers he was borne down and secured in a shed in the yard, until the king should return from the hunting.

Hereward sat there for some while, pondering means of escape, when shouts of boisterous laughter without the door roused him from his scheming. The next moment the door was flung open and two Norman men-at-arms appeared with a captive between them. With gibes and jeers they thrust the prisoner roughly to the floor. "Why, we shall have the whole litter of Saxon swine here soon," cried one. "Give thy countryman good fellowship while thou canst, friend, for 'tis like enow that thine hours are few when the king hears how many of ye Saxons have been about in Brandon this day!" The door shut to again, and with many a rough jest the men strode away.

Hereward turned to look at his new companion and lo! the face he beheld was none other than that of the same youth with whom he had spent so exciting a night in the witch's hut.

"Now how in Loki's name gottest thou hither?" asked Hereward, after staring in utter amaze for a few moments.

"Surely two Normans thrust me in," answered that youth demurely.

Hereward stamped angrily on the floor.

"I tried to cross into Ely," resumed the young Saxon, "and——"

"The outposts took you, of course, young fool," put in Hereward.

There was silence for a time and then Hereward spoke again. "'Twould seem that Wyrd hath willed us to be comrades," said he.

"In misfortune, yea," answered the other.

"As thou sayest," quoth Hereward. "But look thee, how dost thou mean to get hence again?"

"Soothly I know not. There is no hope," said the other with a sigh.

"H'm, I am not so sure of that," said Hereward.

After the which they fell to silence again save for a word now and then. Suddenly was heard a quick step approaching the door. A man entered, his drawn sword in one hand, an iron shackle in the other.

"Come, thou ruffian," said he to Hereward. "I will fetter thee and so make sure that thou dost not 'scape us. Dost know, villain, that the two men thou didst strike are dead?"

"Then has King William lost two thralls and the devil gained two," quoth Hereward. Springing on the man he dealt him such a blow on the head that he fell senseless to the floor. The next instant Hereward had snatched the sword and with one stroke the Norman's head rolled from his body. Hereward beckoned to his companion. "Come now, away! There is freedom!" and he pointed to the door.

"Nay, I will not go. 'Twere best I should remain here," replied the lad.

"Well, I may not bide longer," cried Hereward. "Thou art the strangest being I e'er beheld. Once more, I will save thee an thou wilt."

"Thou wilt save me better by leaving me here. Go, for Heaven's sake. Remember thy wife and the folk in Ely."

"How in the fiend's name knowest thou——" began Hereward.

"Ask not, I know too much of thee," interrupted the other.

Hereward waited no more, but crept warily forth. Over hedges and ditches he scrambled until he had worked his way around to the front of the courtyard. There was Mare Swallow, still tied to the fence. Once in the saddle and he was free. Now he was at the mare's side and had freed her head. Forth sprang a stable-boy.

"Ha, the foul fiend!" he gasped. "The rogue is out of chains. Ho! help there. Murdering devil, thou shalt not escape, fiends and black art! Now, thou Saxon swine!"

Hereward could not, says the chronicler, "put up with his scolding words." He struck the miserable boy a blow which sent him spinning like a top across the courtyard. The next instant he was in the saddle and his good mare broke away with the speed of Odin's hunt. Away, away! And who should overtake them?

Out flocked those Normans who had heard the shouts of the boy, and mounting with all possible speed they gave chase.

As well might they have tried to catch the wind. To their utter amazement the ugly, long-headed creature left the fleetest courser among them far behind.

And as the miles flew by, so, and far more rapidly, flew the thoughts through Hereward's brain. The journey had been one whirl of excitement. What had he gained? He knew the day and the plan of attack; he knew, too, the way in which he would meet it. That troubled him not. But the queer incidents that had befallen him, the two-fold meeting with the Saxon boy whose face seemed so familiar, the manuscript in the witch's hut,

what did these things mean? Hereward resolved the problem in his sturdy Saxon manner—the Norns had decreed their doom; he neither knew nor could hinder it had he known. But he hoped that at least he might meet his end in hand-to-hand strokes with the foe. He hoped, too, that when that end came, he might be laid to rest not in the grey shade of some old-time minster choir, mid the monotone of monkish chants,[1] but out 'neath the open sky, where the red stag might graze on the very grass of his grave and the wolf howl at night o'er the cairn of the mighty dead. For aye to hear the bray of the red harts on the hillside, the scream of the kite, poised in mid-air, the boom of the bittern as he stalked the banks of desolate morasses; for such a home his very soul did yearn, a home whence the livelong night he might wander on the brown hillside amid the wild creatures, free and careless as they.

He dared not ride the most direct way, but struck south to avoid Cambridge town. Crossing the Cam he rode thence northward through Madingley into Somersham woods.

Of his pursuers none save one knight ever saw him, and that one had ridden as far as he might and could scarcely stand upon his feet, while his horse was in like evil case. Hereward found him lying nearly breathless on the ground and inquired who he was.

"I am a knight of the king's court in pursuit of a ruffian who has foully slain three of ours to-day. And if thou hast seen or heard anything of him, tell me for Heaven's sake and of thy great kindness."

"As thou hast asked for Heaven's sake, and of my great kindness, know that I am he whom thou seekest. Now

[1] For these sentiments I am indebted to Mr. Kingsley's poem, "The Outlaw."

that thou mayest know this the more truly to prove to thy lord that thou hast spoken with me, thou shalt leave thy lance and sword and shalt pledge thy knightly word to declare to William the truth and the truth only, if thou desirest thy life at my hands. Furthermore thou shalt say to William that the challenge to single combat which he sent to Harold, King of England, would be accepted in Ely, should William choose to offer it again. In token whereof thou shalt hand him this sword which I took to-day from his court at Brandon."

The knight shrugged his shoulders, but being almost breathless was obliged to promise compliance. To which story the Norman chiefs listened in utter amaze while William swore repeatedly that he had never heard of a more distinguished and high-souled warrior.

"Would he were mine own liegeman," he cried. "And that he shall be some day. Look to it, sirs, that ye do him no injury but bring him safe to me and ten thousand silver marks to the man that takes him."

At early dawn Hereward found a ceorl to ferry him over to the isle. There he set about strengthening his position with abattis formed of tree-trunks and branches in case the Normans should effect a landing. And he called every man he could find in the districts bordering the camp and prepared to renew the war by striking the first blow himself.

Soon was the Norman army marched once more to Cambridge and thence through Willingham along St. Etheldreda's Causeway to face Aldreth, and William sent for all the fishermen of the district to come with their boats to Cotinglade to aid in carrying over the vast pile of stones and wood he had caused to be brought in order to rebuild the causeway. Moreover, he set up mounds and hillocks wherefrom his men might fight. Among

the fishermen came one with close-shaven hair and beard, who glanced keenly around him while plying his tasks with the utmost zeal. But ere the following morn the works were a heap of charred timber, and more than one Norman guard had perished by fire or drowning. In seven days the French had with difficulty erected one siege-work.

William flew into a terrible rage when he heard how he had once more been baffled. He doubled the guard over the siege-works and increased his offer for the capture of Hereward's person to fifteen thousand marks. But he loved so daring and skilful a foe and once more gave command that Hereward was to be taken alive and brought in to him.

"An my witch bring it not about, I see not how he may be taken. He uses black art," quoth Ivo.

"Yea, not otherwise might a man do such deeds," answered Ascelin, and the gloomy silence of the other Norman chiefs showed that these had but voiced the general opinion.

CHAPTER XVI

EXCEPT HEREWARD ALONE!

Cowards die many times before their deaths,
The valiant never taste of death but once.
SHAKSPERE.

WITH great toil and no small loss of life from the harassing attacks Hereward made from time to time, the Normans succeeded in setting up four structures of wood, circular in shape, on which their engines of war, balistas and catapults, were placed. And on the eighth day the witch of Brandon was seen upon a tower in the midst of the men-at-arms, and the great army advanced along the new causeway. Much stronger and wider was this second bridge and the king himself rode along it, urging his men to the attack.

The whole chivalry of the Norman army followed his example. There was de Brus, ancestor of the immortal Scottish monarch; there Lord Montacute, whose son had witnessed Hereward's strife with his two fellow pages, years before, at Westminster; William Malet, formerly Governor of York; Roger FitzOsbern, Ralph Guader, Ascelin, Warrenne, Taillebois and a host of others. And there on the tower stood the vile hag muttering spells, shrieking forth curses on the Englishmen. She shook her clenched fists at the sky, invoking the spirit of the storm while the vault of heaven, sublimely peaceful, shone like one great sapphire above her head. Again she turned to her maledictions, accompanying them with vile and repulsive

gestures. Quarrels, shafts, great stones from the balistas, spears in showers, flew into the camp and Hereward drew back his men a short distance from the turf rampart.

"Hold back your darts, men," quoth he calmly.

The great column was rapidly nearing the end of the new causeway. Hereward signed to a small band of warriors he had set apart from the rest.

"The time is at hand, comrades," said he. "Come now!" And he crept to the side of the Westwater and disappeared with the handful of men, while Geri stepped to the head of the main force engaged at the rampart.

A light puff of smoke rose from the reeds, there was a glow in the heart of the osiers to the west of the camp. Yet on the Normans pressed. Time after time they flung out pontoon bridges to span the distance between them and the turf rampart of the Saxons. For if enough men could cross, the isle was theirs. All at once a great cry arose. The column was surrounded by flames. The osiers and reeds had been fired!

It was true! At the risk of destroying his own cover, Hereward had fired the reeds. The Norman column fell back in terrible disorder, and a hail of darts, arrows and spears fell upon it. The flames surged up on each side and many of the men-at-arms, overpowered by the heat, flung themselves into the black ooze beneath them. Nor could the cantrips of the witch hold back the flames. Licking the sides of her tower, up they climbed until, with a shriek of despair, the wretched creature flung herself down and broke her neck.

The fire, which extended some two furlongs, now raged with the utmost fury. In vain did William try to rally his men upon that narrow bridge. In vain did he shout to them to wheel about and retire orderly. Each man thought of nothing save his own life. The column

staggered and fled in the wildest disorder. Who could, kept the bridge, who could not, sank in the slimy ooze. And all the while a storm of shafts and spears rained on them, increasing the disorder. One arrow, shot with terrific force, passed clean through William's plated shield and a cry of alarm was raised as the king rode into camp.

"I am unhurt, gentles all," cried William. "But for those who advised me to use that accursed woman, let them beware!"

Ivo Taillebois slipped away from the group at this point.

"Even to have listed the counsel were disgrace enow to such as profess themselves Christians," added the king.

The Normans, disheartened and demoralised, refused to attack the isle again. Wherefore William fell back on Cambridge. But the blockade was never relaxed and, alas for England! the faint hearts were not all in the Norman camp.

Nevertheless, the great general was almost at his wits' end, for Normandy was threatened by the King of France, and besides, the repeated reverses to the Norman arms aroused martial feelings in the spirit of those English already subdued by William. Plots were being framed —that he knew. So he sent to Canterbury for Lanfranc of Pavia and held counsel with him.

But there were defections in the isle. Hereward knew that William dared not leave it unsubdued. Edwin and Morcar trembled. So also did Abbot Thurstan, and showed his fear by fleeing to Angerhale with the ornaments and treasures of his monastery. The two young earls behaved exactly as they had always behaved. Undecided and changeable as ever, they began once more to discuss the chance of gaining William's pardon. Morcar was probably swayed by purely selfish reasons. Edwin must see his Norman love before the end.

So one morning Hereward found Edwin missing. It was no more than he had expected. He knew the characters of his nephews well enough and thought fit to counsel Morcar on the subject.

"Thy brother has gone, Earl Morcar?" he queried, when the chiefs met late that evening.

"Ay, he is gone, Hereward," replied the young earl. "A pity, too, for some of us, that we have not gone likewise."

"Words of treason, young man. Have a care!" quoth Hereward. Siward Barn and Geri nodded their heads.

"Treason, pooh!" answered Morcar. "Who art thou to dictate our actions?"

"I am at least the chief of this stronghold, and unless thy tone is milder there are those here who will obey mine orders concerning thee." Morcar laughed.

"O best and bravest of Saxons, thou wilt not need to order. But in sooth I weary of this prison."

"Mayhap thou shalt weary of another prison. O Morcar, be not foolish. Stand firm for England. Die fighting to the last and thy fame shall live for aye! But an thou yieldest to the Norman, Earl Morcar, an evil thing shall befal thee. Betray not us as thou didst King Harold."

The chiefs growled approval but Morcar said no more. In a short time he, too, was missing from the camp. He came in to William, and the Norman, having no further use for him, sent him in chains to Warwick Castle, once Leofric's, but now in charge of Roger de Beaumont. As for Edwin, he strove to make his way to the place where he might once more see his lady. He was harassed by the Normans and either they or his own men surrounded and slew him. His head was brought to William and the

fair young face bedabbled with gore drove the king wild with remorse. He covered his eyes as the story proceeded and then when the men had finished he roared to Taillebois, who came in fear.

"These traitors have slain the Lord's anointed," said William. "Wherefore they shall die. See thou to it!"

Whereupon Ivo, by no means displeased, caused those men to be hanged on the common without the town. Thus did William act as in bygone ages acted David when he heard of the unworthy death of Saul his rightful liege.

But Morcar went to a life in death in Roger de Beaumont's castle in Normandy. Released in the Conqueror's dying hour, he was imprisoned by Rufus for the rest of his days.

King William, having now taken solemn counsel with Lanfranc and the priests, decreed that the lands of St. Etheldreda without the isle should pass to priests of his own choosing.

So he sent in to the isle a message which had the effect of bringing back Abbot Thurstan from Angerhale.

St. Etheldreda must keep her lands intact, that was certain. Her curse would rest upon her servants of Ely for ever should a single hide pass into other hands. The abbot trembled at the thought. So also did the prior and the monks. Perhaps also being, after all, Churchmen first and warriors only of need, they wearied of this never-ending siege. In any case they sent bodes to the king, promising to show him a secret way into the isle if only the Church lands were left entire. Were they profaned in the slightest detail the curse of St. Etheldreda and of her three handmaids, St. Withberga, St. Sexberga and St. Ermenilda, would rest upon Norman and Saxon alike, from William the king down to the son of

the poorest ceorl in Kesteven. And William, though for the sake of Ely he would without doubt have risked the anger of the heavenly maidens, was in a degree superstitious himself and glad to avoid anything that might seem an outrage in the eyes of his own clergy.

It was Martin Lightfoot who first got wind of the treason. From the moment that the trusty runner saw that the abbot had returned he became suspicious. But Hereward had left the isle on a foraging expedition and to know what to do was not easy. If he, Martin, took Torfrida and her daughter, he would be seriously hampered in his search for Hereward. But he dared not leave them to the mercy of the Normans. There was but one man whom he felt he could trust and he would go in search of him. But first his lady.

He found Torfrida in her bower, reading to the little girl from Ælfric's *Homilies*. Martin fell on his knee :

" Lady, we are deceived, betrayed. The French will be in the isle within an hour or so."

Torfrida took the news calmly. " I thought as much," said she. " I caught a few of the whispers of these traitor monks and I have seen the abbot."

" Come, lady, we must go," cried Martin. " I know a safe place of hiding where you can both stay concealed until my lord's return."

A rustling sound was heard without and looking warily forth Martin saw many monks, not girt in honest wise, with their swords as a few days before, but in the ordinary black garb of the Benedictines. They were marching solemnly in the direction of Aldreth. His rapid mind took in the situation at once. " They are to admit the Normans," thought he.

" No time now for delay, lady," quoth he, and picking up the little Torfrida he ran out at the back of the house

"Lady, we are betrayed!"

His lady followed. Martin gained the northern front of the monastery and lifted a wooden trap-door. He made signs to Torfrida to follow, and descending a ladder they found themselves in the cool semi-darkness of the Saxon crypt.

" Why dost thou bring us here, Martin ? " queried the little girl. " 'Tis eerie and chill. I am sure ghosts live here."

" Ay," chuckled Martin, " ghosts are spirits and they live up above as well, little lady, and evil ones too, at that, worse than ever a one we shall meet with here."

Then did he touch the wall and a secret door flew open. The abbot alone was supposed to know of its existence but Martin had ever lived with eyes wide open.

Hendyng's proverb, " Wit and wisdom is good ward," was always a favourite rede of his.

" Now, lady, I must leave you awhile to get news sent to Lord Hereward. You will find wine and meat within. My lord the abbot doth not keep secret alcoves for naught."

" Ay, go," cried Torfrida, " find Hereward. Let him not walk into Ely to his death. Find him, man. Go, at once ! Wouldst thou have my curse ? "

But Martin had quietly closed the door and was already up the ladder. He quickly found his friend, the monk Alwin Orgarsson.

" Now Alwin, what thinkest thou of these matters ? " queried Martin.

" Treason, Martin, treason ! And Hereward will walk into the trap. Oh, noble heart, must thou, too, be butchered all unkenning ? "

" Make not so much clatter, thou fool," snarled Martin Dragging him beneath the projecting eaves of a house close by, he went on, " Our lord will escape an thou wilt hearken my rede. Go forth to meet him—I must remain

here. And, Alwin, let him have this." Martin thrust a writing into his hands. "I trow thee true man, but an I found other I would cut thy throat were the ghosts of Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver and the Paladins here with Rollo, Richard and Robert the Devil, let alone William the Tanner!"

Alwin gasped. "Thou needest not to wrong me, Martin."

"Nay, I have ever found thee honest true. Now go, and Odin speed thee!"

"The Lord be my help!" answered Alwin, and slipped into the darkness.

For the autumn even had now fallen and there was not much light as Hereward with his men made their way towards Ely. Hearing rapid footfalls upon the road, he gave the word to halt. The next moment Alwin was amongst them.

All breathless was he as he stood before his chief.

"Not a step further, noble lord," he burst forth. "There is treason in the isle. The abbot hath admitted the Normans!"

The silence of despair reigned supreme for a few moments. Hereward was the first to break it.

"Torches!" he cried, "torches and faggots. We will fire Ely as we fired Golden Burgh. Quick, men!"

"Madness," cried Alwin. "You will never get there. The Norman army is within a furlong of you, at Witchford."

"'Tis thou who art mad to bring me such tidings," roared Hereward. "And thou art a monk! Have a care, fellow! Out of my way, I will to Ely!"

Alwin thrust the note into his hands. Hereward read it, and then out flashed his great sword:

"Come, men," he cried. "There be those of the French

shall rue this day's work!" And he pressed on desperately.

As for Alwin, he bore himself like the true man he was. Seeing that his rede was of no avail he tore forth his sword and fell into the line. Furiously they raced on Witchford. There in front was the main force of the Normans, with spears levelled to meet the mad onrush.

"Form a wedge, brave hearts," roared Hereward. "Now shall we win freedom or Valhalla!" And the Saxon wedge burst upon the line. Dire indeed was the strife. In a moment the small force was surrounded. But such was the hardihood of the Englishmen that naught, for the moment, could withstand them. A whirl of flashing swords, oaths, shouts and screams and they were through, a long track of dead and dying behind them.

"Follow the rebels, men," shouted William, and the French pressed hard upon the Saxons as they won to Ely Minster. The English, with Geri at their head, rallied around the church into which Hereward now rushed. Down the crypt stairs he dashed and beheld his wife and daughter, cowering beneath a pillar.

"Come, Torfrida!" he cried. "All is lost, yet may we win freedom." He led the way upward, mounted his wife and daughter upon the mare and the English formed around them. They were surrounded by the Normans on all sides, but with Hereward at their head they strove to fight their way to a great mound, the remains of some ancient camp, a little to the north of Ely Minster. On, on they pressed with shouts of "Hereward for England!" and that dreaded name struck such terror into the hearts of the French that the way cleared before the wedge's head. And well it might! Such were the

champion's strokes that each time his blade fell a foeman bit the dust. Nor shield, nor helm, nor hauberk could withstand the terrible shearing sweep of that ponderous blade, wielded by England's stoutest arm. His eagle shield erect, and the great sword flung back behind his head, he trampled the Normans down, one after another. Right well did Winter, Geri, Gwenoch, Ranald of Ramsey and the three Siwards second his efforts. The French line before them was growing thin. Could they but gain the mound, the woods rose grim and gloomy behind. Once therein they might escape under cover of the night and thence by many a fen path all unknown to the Normans. William as well as Hereward saw this and cursing his men the king roared out to his knights promises of reward and threats of punishment. Ivo was there, Ascelin and the Bretons Oger and Raoul, but they shrank from the fatal blade at the point of the wedge. At last William Malet, he who had escaped from the ruins of York, burning to regain his fair name with the king, shouted high above the battle:

"If none other dare, I will assail him! Thou didst call me traitor, king. Lo, I will wipe out my reproach or die! *A Malet! à Malet!*" and he sprang at Hereward. A shower of sparks flew around their heads as the blades met and such was the force of the impact that Malet staggered back and nearly fell. Before he could lift his bowed head, the great sword had flashed again. It cut a circle in the air and lit clean on the back of the Norman's neck, shearing through the arteries as a mower's sickle cuts through the corn-sheaves. Trampling over his body the Saxons gained the mound, and for a full hour they held it against every charge the Normans made. Then came a wild cheer from the town and the French redoubled their efforts.

"We must retreat now, Geri," quoth Hereward, and shouted, "Enough has been done for honour. Push slowly through the forest, men, and keep a bold front to these rats."

Many of the bolder spirits among the enemy pressed into the forest after Hereward, but they who could hold their own in the open were little likely to be vanquished when shielded by the gloom of the wood. So after some brisk fighting with the pursuers they won through the forest to Well, whereat was a "wide mere." There the force found many a friendly barge and embarked.

For a time among the swamps and morasses they had freedom from pursuit and here they remained for several days. But under threats of torture some fishermen taken in Ely showed William a route whereby he might approach them. The king sent a large force under Taillebois, who as Lord of Spalding was the only one among his leaders who might be expected to know something of the fen country. Guided by the Saxons the force well-nigh surprised Hereward, and he had barely time to get his men into a thick clump of alders ere the Normans were in full sight.

"Take heed, chief, that the mare does not neigh," said Geri as they lay down.

"There is no danger," answered Hereward in a troubled voice. Geri looked at him. His head was bowed low and his whole manner betokened a deep dejection.

"Rouse thee, Hereward, for the sake of us all! Surely thou dost not despair now? We have come through worse dangers than this and will live to face others. Why, what ails thee, dear lord?"

"I weep for an old and trusted friend."

"Why, whom have we lost?"

"Mare Swallow," answered Hereward.

"Surely thou dost not mean——"

"Dost think I would let any Frenchman boast that he had taken Hereward's horse? I slew her as we entered the thicket. Would that it might rather have been myself."

Geri was silent, appalled. They lay there for some hours until the Normans drew off. Then Hereward sent spies to see where they had set their camp. These brought the tidings that the French knights had ordered certain Saxon fishermen to bring them in the morn supplies of fish.

"Good," quoth Hereward, "we will visit them. We are in sore need of horses."

Carefully selecting about twenty axemen Hereward told Geri to lead the remaining Saxons to the rear of the Norman camp and there in ambush await the signal. When the boom of a bittern should resound through the morning air he was to fall with might and main upon the French rear.

The next morning Hereward directed the fishermen to hide his picked company in the bottom of the boats. This they willingly did, piling heaps of straw upon them.

The Normans took the fish, Taillebois cursing the fishermen for not arriving earlier, and the meal was made ready. But while the French were quietly seated upon the grass, burbot, pike, roach and eel spread out before them, the deep boom of a bittern sounded from the fen below them. A warder notched a shaft to his bow and strolled to the brink of the water. Naught was in view save the boats of the fishers, lying placidly at anchor. He turned about to go back.

"Now, men, have at them," roared Hereward, springing to the shore. The warder wheeled and drew the grey goose feather to his ear, but ere he could loose the cord

it was shorn through by a blow which laid him lifeless on the turf. The next moment the terrible shout of "Hereward for England!" rang in the ears of the Normans. Taillebois sprang to his feet with an oath and, seizing lance and shield, roared, "*A moi, hommes d'armes!*" It was too late. The axemen were in the camp and down went the nearest French. But others rushed up and Hereward's men were hotly engaged when Geri burst on the rear of the camp. This settled the matter and Taillebois was utterly routed, although that worthy himself secured his own horse, a very fine one which William had given him, and succeeded in escaping with a score of his knights. The horses of the Normans stood ready saddled and Hereward's men seized them with joy and rode back, nearly all horsed at the Frenchmen's expense.

Hereward now sent forth spies to Cissham to find some whom he had sent from Ely to waste the land around with fire. The men had heard of the fall of the Camp of Refuge and were in hiding in a small island called Stimtench. They mistook Hereward's scouts for Normans, and two, Starkwulf and Broher, who lay together in one thicket, bethought them that they would be safer with a monkish tonsure to their crowns. So as best he could each shaved the other's head with his sword, and a strange sight did they present when shouts in honest Saxon from the searchers revealed the truth and brought the fugitives into the open. After which the two parties joined forces and returned to Hereward.

The chieftain had now about a hundred men in all. To yield to the king was in no man's heart. But what was to be done? Whither might they go?

"Up into the Bruneswald, to the merry greenwood," quoth Hereward. "We are all free men, good and true. As such we will die but never yield while an accursed

Frenchman remains alive on this our English soil. But there we shall live as free as the winds, with venison to eat, water of the clear spring to drink, and a home in every yeoman's hut. And as for sport there be other wild beasts beside deer. We have been hunted long enough, I trow. Let us become the hunters. Martin, fill every man's horn with the good mead. Now, merry men all. This waes hael to the merry greenwood, our home from henceforth!"

"Drinc hael! Aoi! Aoi! Skall to the Viking! Hereward! Hereward for merry England! A waes hael to the greenwood!" came a chorus of cheers from the men, delighted at the prospect of a new campaign in which they might be the aggressors.

"We shall fare better than we did in Ely," cried Leofric. "There we were shut in, now we may scathe the Frenchman at every step of his march!"

And away they went to the great Bruneswald, which then stretched not only across Kesteven but northward to merry Sherwood and southward to the mighty forest of Rockingham.

"A fair and noble course have we here," quoth Hereward. "Men, build me a stronghold and then let some search for fugitives from Ely."

They built a strong abattis of tree-trunks and branches and forth went scouring parties to find those who, stout of heart to the end, scorned the safe serfdom the Norman offered. And, to the credit of England be it said, many a one did they find. So that at last Hereward found himself at the head of a force of a hundred picked men-at-arms, and two hundred "very sturdy men, besides slingers and archers." There on the free turf 'neath the shade of the mighty oaks, typical for ever of England's glorious solitary strength, himself the stoutest oak among

them, he awaited the invaders' next attack. All the chieftains of England, the Godwinssons, the Siwardssons, the Gospatricssons, the Algarssons, even Edric the Forester himself, had yielded to the terrible odds against them. And Ely had fallen! In those noble words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "*buton Herewerde anum*," (except Hereward alone), all had submitted save Hereward. Free and defiant he still held the field against the whole force of Norman England.

Well may Englishmen of this and all ages yet to come follow the example of their downtrodden Saxon forefathers and glory in his memory and in the thought that they may claim him as a fellow countryman!

CHAPTER XVII

OF THE ROSE OF ENGLAND

Loyal to his love, great-souled is he.
Through loyalty men live righteously
With one virtue and loyalty
A man may yet sufficient be:
Without loyalty may none have price,
Or be he wight or be he wise;
For where 'tis lacking, no virtue
May be of worth, nor of value,
To make a man so good that he
May simply calléd good man be.

BARBOUR: "The Brus." (*Translated literally.*)

AND now it was that Hereward began to win such love from the poor Saxons, his countrymen, that for centuries later his praises were sung throughout the land, ay, and even in the very ears of the proud conquerors who knew not the English tongue.

Defender of the downtrodden serf, avenger of the robbed yeoman, the name they had given him, "England's Darling," was ever on their tongues, a blessing for him ever in their hearts. He brought them freedom from fear, and their steads were ever open to his men, while in many a secret way did they aid him with supplies.

Right and left he harried the Normans, firing the towns held by the barons, and waylaying their trains bound for the chase. And many a wealthy foreign

prelate went his ways a poor man when he had by mischance fallen in with England's champion.

But heavy were the toils and hardships the brave little band had to face. True, that while summer and autumn lasted, they did well in the greenwood. But when winter had once bound the country with his icy chains the life, it must be confessed, was dreary and wearisome in the last degree.

However, custom soon inured them to it, and strong and sturdy men enough before, the Saxons became as hard as nails and terrible foes to the Norman tyrants. Winter, Geri, Gwenoch and Matelgar were each a match for three knights at a time, and the chief thought it a small matter to fight seven together.

And for Torfrida, what was her part? Hers was the drudgery made needful by the straits in which her lord and his men so often found themselves. She had to sew and cook and toil until small wonder that her skin hardened and carking care sat on those cheeks where formerly only roses had bloomed. But if the outward radiance faded from her face that inward light of loving devotion shone the more glorious, and she clung to the fortunes of her husband with desperate fidelity. Yes! all would have been well had Hereward been able to sound the depth of the ocean of her love. But alas for him! grand though were some of his sudden thoughts, great as often were his aspirations, his eyes saw little below the surface, and with the thought of the probable extinction of his line, stept in the Tempter.

Torfrida had no son. If Hereward hoped at last to win his paternal estates from William, he must have a male heir to whom to hand them. For otherwise they would soon be alienated to some one or other of the French upstarts, as he called them.

Taillebois, the wood-tax gatherer of Anjou, held Spalding, Evermue was at Deeping, Gilbert of Ghent at Lincoln, and Thorold at Peterborough. Such was the situation. But the circle of hunters could by no means draw their net around the lion in their midst.

At this time Hereward bethought him that he would go alone to spy out how it fared with his father's ancient hall at Bourne. Approaching by way of Elsey Wood and Stamford Hill, he crept through the forest until he had almost reached the moat. The hall stood there, but no banner or armorial device might he see thereon. Only upon the narrow little bridge that crossed the moat from the west stood a single figure, leaning against the rough rail of the bridge. Creeping nearer the chieftain could see that this solitary watcher was gazing toward the hall and had therefore his back turned to Hereward. From his slight build he seemed a mere youth. The Saxon crept nearer until he could touch the bridge's end with outstretched arm. At that moment the lad on the bridge turned and stood staring over Hereward's head into the woods beyond. He was attired in a page's hunting dress of soft grey doe-skin, which fitted his slender form like a glove, and the chief was struck with the marvellous beauty of his face. The next second and Hereward knew him as the boy he had met in the witch's hut at Brandon. Another mystery! But they should end now.

With a growl Hereward sprang to his feet, sword in hand. The page, with a little cry, drew a light court sword of finest steel, but with a laugh Hereward brought down the flat of his weapon on the lad's wrist. The slender sword splashed in the moat below.

"Now who or what in the fiend's name art thou?" snapped Hereward, but he was destined to yet another

surprise. For the lad gave a quick glance at the strong, angry face before him, and with a cry flung his arms around Hereward's neck.

"O Hereward, I have met thee once again. Each day have I longed for thee, each hour have I feared lest thou shouldst lose thy life in these perils. Why dost thou not speak to me? Is my face then so strange to Hereward?"

There was no longer room for doubt. The Saxon youth at Brandon was the page at Bourne, and both were——

"Alftruda," said Hereward, in a low but steady voice, "what is the meaning of these strange devices?"

But he knew that he need not have asked the question.

"Thou didst not know me at Brandon, Hereward. I felt that I must get into Ely to persuade thee to yield to William. He would be glad enow to receive thee as his man and restore thee to thine own again. The Normans took me captive and thrust me in with thee and I durst not attempt to escape thence with thee for fear they might suspect thy disguise if we were taken. When the king came back from hunting I was soon free, and to hear him laugh! Not even the tale of those Normans thou didst slay could put him out of humour. When he heard that it was Hereward himself who had so tricked him he swore that he would make thee an earl if thou wouldst render thine homage."

"Peace, lady," quoth Hereward. "No more of William, I beg thee."

"Ah, but hear me out, Hereward. He also swore—thou knowest the terrible way in which he does swear—that he would give thee——'

"What?" queried Hereward, observing that she faltered.

Alftruda bent her head slightly forward as she answered lowly :

" Me."

Hereward started and his right hand clenched so tightly on the old bridge rail that the rotten wood almost crumbled.

" What of Earl Dolfin, thy husband ? "

" Earl Dolfin, my husband, was slain last Wolfmonth in battle on the Border." Then petulantly with a stamp of the foot and a toss of her pretty head :

" I suppose I ought to be sorry."

" What of——"

" Thy witch-wife ? Lanfranc has the Pope's ear and will befriend me."

" Hush, hush, lady. Speak not so of Torfrida."

" There are none there," said Alftruda, pointing to the hall. " Shall we not go within ? "

Against his own judgment, Hereward followed her. Much talk indeed had they therein and Hereward gained little good therefrom save the tidings that at William's order seven shires had raised their men to hunt the last free Saxons from the Bruneswald.

" And now, Alftruda, tell me this," quoth Hereward. " There was a parchment in the hut at Brandon and thereon writ——"

" Ay, runes deep and dark. I fear lest it be against us. The she-wolf was for ever cursing me."

" Thou hast right. Thy name was there."

Alftruda shuddered.

" Why does she hate thee so ? " asked Hereward.

" 'Tis a long story. Before she took to black art and devil-spells she was a serf of my father at Eye. She held ever that I was the cause of her getting the ducking-stool and the lash to boot. I was aye afraid of her looks

"Alftruda answered lowly, 'Me'"

and doings. She fled at last to the forest for fear the village folk would burn her. I never saw her again till that day at Gilbert's Castle in Northumbria—the day thou didst slay the felon knights." Alftruda shivered at the memory. "Since then," she resumed, "whenever we meet, thou and I, she is there too."

"She is dead," cried Hereward, "she fell from the tower at the second assault on Ely."

"Not so, that was the other one, her sister as she called her. They are fiendish creatures, Heaven knows how old, they belong to the time when the Normans were yet Odinmen. They captured me as I was trying to get into Ely isle, and what I endured with them I cannot say. William would have hanged them for that had not Taillebois sworn that they could bring ruin on Ely."

"Now what of thyself? Whither wilt thou now?"

"To Peterborough. Thorold has me as ward at present. Soon mayhap some one else may have a stronger claim. Why not?" She blushed prettily. Hereward could never at any time in his life resist the strong charm the lovely Saxon had for him. He caught her in his arms and, kissing her repeatedly, cried:

"May it be soon, soon, Alftruda, mine own. I mistrust me of William and all his Normans; but come life, come death, thou shalt be mine! And death can come but once!"

They were now on the very outskirts of the town of Bourne, and Hereward was in the act of taking leave of his charming companion when a grating voice cried, as it seemed in his very ear:

"Ay, ay, Death comes once, but he comes to stay! He cometh and with him his leman, Life in Death. Say, thou woman Alftruda, when doth Death go?"

Alftruda shrieked with fear and leant against the wall for support, while Hereward with savage oaths rushed hither and thither.

"An I lay hold on thee thou shalt try that for thyself," he roared. "The foul Fiend is dodging our footsteps."

"For Heaven's sake, Hereward, come here," cried Alftruda. "I have guards at the inn in the town and they will know thee! Ah, it was she again, the witch."

"Why, didst see her?" asked Hereward.

"Not so, I saw naught. But the voice is hers."

"The Fiend her master quite her her cursed raven's voice, 'tis ugly almost as her face."

He watched Alftruda till she entered the inn and then swung about. The men of the seven shires must be well received.

On arriving in camp he sent forth spies and then flung up great abattis of trees and branches, hiding his archers within. He dug pits all about and set spears therein, having determined to try a pitched battle with the Normans on his own ground.

When Alftruda reached Peterborough she was full of her meeting with Hereward, never dreaming in her joy that it would perhaps have been better to be silent. The abbot, now grown very portly, frowned at her from his high seat on the daïs. Gilbert of Ghent, his guest that day, was at his right hand, his lovely ward being on the left. Suddenly Gilbert caught the abbot's eye, and the two worthies gazed each at other. Then their regard fell upon Alftruda, who looked up.

"Sirs, the lady who attracts so much attention from two such honourable gentlemen must needs be some deal embarrassed."

"Alftruda, my child," said the fat abbot blandly,

"fetch me my harp and I will sing to you of my *Chanson de Roland*."

All looked delighted at this, for the abbot had a magnificent voice and was justly reckoned a great minstrel. No sooner had Alftruda gone than the abbot gave the signal for all to withdraw. He then looked at Gilbert. "I should not hinder her meetings with Hereward?"

"Put chances in her way," quoth Gilbert.

And the abbot: "She is our best weapon against him!"

"Father, your wit is as clear as your voice," said Gilbert.

"We understand each other," quoth Thorold.

"It would seem so indeed," commented Gilbert.

When Alftruda came in once more the warrior-priest uplifted his voice and sang with great fervour some stanzas from the grand *Chanson de Roland*. He was crafty enough to intermingle therewith a love episode, and after hinted to Alftruda that her former guardian, Gilbert, and he, her spiritual father, thought well of her friendship with so famous a young man as Hereward. Then he sent her to rest with her head full of love-dreams and romances, and himself sat talking with the wily Gilbert long into the night. When at length they rose he was very confident of success and with heart much elated he embraced him of Ghent warmly.

"If we slay him not to-morrow when Ivo and I go forth against him——"

"Which ye will not do," quoth Gilbert.

"We shall find a chance when he marries Alftruda and is at peace with the king."

"That may well be," quoth the Fleming. "Heaven grant it. He is a standing menace to Golden Borough."

"And also to Lincoln City."

"He hates us both."

"We might find him reasons therefor."

The next morning Thorold, chaunting loudly the song of Roland, rode forth at the head of his knights and men-at-arms to meet Ivo Taillebois, Count of Spalding, similarly provided. Long, long they rode into the damp, misty thickets without finding a trace of the Saxons. At length they came to a throat in the woods that ran between two dense copses, black as night and full of thorns. On the outside of one of the thickets fresh hoof-prints could be seen. Not wishing to rust their arms or tear their fine clothes, some half of the force under Thorold remained without to cut off the Saxons. Ivo, followed by his grumbling knights, drove his way into the copse, and for a long while the Normans in the open heard nothing. Then of a sudden from the opposite copse issued many knights and men-at-arms. They formed into a double line and lowered their spears.

"'Tis Ivo," muttered Thorold. "Ah no, great Heavens, the eagle banner! Form up, *hommes d'armes!*"

Too late! No time was there for order. A few moments more and the French knights were rolling on the grass. Thorold and Ascelin yielded at discretion. As for Taillebois, he found himself entangled in the abattis and taken in flank by Hereward's victorious force.

Glad indeed was he to escape with the loss of many knights and men-at-arms. He returned to Spalding, a sadder if a wiser man, leaving the abbot to Hereward's mercy.

Which mercy cost Thorold thirty-six thousand silver marks—the ransom of himself and his nephew Ascelin.

After which Gilbert and Thorold redoubled their efforts to secure through Alftruda Hereward's submission. And

she, innocently enough so far as Hereward's safety was concerned, complied readily with all their plans.

Many a time did she secretly meet him, and if this were impossible he always received a writing from her. Meanwhile the two and their innocent confederate were at work with the king. And William was glad enough at the prospect of peace with so doughty a foeman.

It was Martin as usual who bore Torfrida the first hint of the approaching climax. He came to her one morn when Hereward had just set out to hunt, as he said. Martin fell on his knee and, using the same words as at the fall of Ely, murmured:

"Lady, we are deceived, betrayed."

"Stand up, man," said Torfrida. "Is my lord's safety concerned?"

"Ay, lady, the very safety of his soul is at stake."

The words were Torfrida's death-knell and she knew, more by instinct than aught else, what he meant. She had seen that Hereward's love for her had been cooling, and she had not been deceived by somewhat of added courtliness toward her of late.

> When Love begins to sicken and decay
> It uses an enforcéd ceremony.

She had known now for some time of his former friendship with Alftruda, and her woman's soul supplied the rest.

She heard Martin's story out with pale set face, and then bade him get a sledge ready to bear her to Croyland. And so, without using one word of reproach, she went with a load of unrequited love almost unbearable in her heart.

When Hereward heard that she had gone, he called his men together and showed them that the time had come when it was needful to submit to William. He

gave them the king's pledges for their safety and told them—for he must needs explain in some wise—how that for fear that his wife the Lady Torfrida should be tried before a Norman court as a witch, he had sent her to Croyland where she would be with his own mother and under the shadow of the Church's wing. With her had gone Leofric the scop, now a deacon once more, and Martin Lightfoot, as an escort, said Hereward. He called upon the rest to remain as his retainers at Bourne.

Even as he spake he felt the insincerity of his words, and his mind was torn by the conflicting passions of desire and remorse. He knew well enough that, perilous as his present life was, that which he had in view was ten times more so.

For his men, the major portion gave way as usual to his appeal. But there stood forth one, a tall warrior of noble mien, and when Hereward beheld him he knew him for Sigtryg, King of Waterford, who had come with his Ost-Danes to Ely and being too late had joined forces with the champions of the greenwood, and had done great deeds for them.

"Hereward," said he, "thou didst twice save my wife from shame and wrong, therefore am I here. Thy blood-brother am I the while that thy road is the path of honour. But now indeed is our brotherhood severed for that which thou dost is false and base, nor can any man fight for thee in honour. To Hereward the true warrior, this sword is vowed for aye, with Hereward the recreant knight it owneth no bond. Wherefore I will——"

"Back to thy wife in Waterford, and with speed, I deem," sneered Hereward. "Hence, lest the Normans harm thee. But beware how thou call'st me recreant."

For he heard murmurs among his men and must stay Sigtryg's words at any cost.

"Recreant art thou to faith and true love," answered Sigtryg calmly. "I fear not for myself, but only for thee. Whether I am coward or no let these around us deem. Farewell, Hereward, once the bright star of battle and victory; may the gods yet spare thy life and grant thee sorrow for thy crimes."

And Sigtryg, whose majestic face bore signs of suffering, tore from his neck the eagle badge with which the Saxon chief had decorated him after the battle with Thorold and Ivo, and flung it at Hereward's feet.

"Have there thy dishonoured emblem," he cried, "and thus much duty doth the sword of honour owe to a mansworn knight."

He snapped his blade across his knee and turned upon his heel. His Danes and the two Siwards followed him; and Hereward, to his own surprise, raised no hand against him. He was to learn the truth of the poet's words:

A sinful heart makes feeble hand.

On account of Torfrida's loss many evils happened to him, because she was most wise and great of counsel in need. For afterwards, as he himself often stated, many things chanced not so well for him as in her time.

Then did Hereward take Geri, Gwenoch and Matelgar and set out to ride to the king at Winchester. And as he was riding through a glade in the Bruneswald he suddenly met with a mighty man, who rode at the head of five knights. They were all attired in the Saxon dress and Hereward thought that save for Hardrada alone he had never seen a warrior of such noble mien as was his who led them.

"Hail to thee, fair sir," quoth he. "What is thy name and rank?"

"What the devil is that to thee?" was the surly

answer. "Stand from my path ere I deal with thee as would to Heaven some one else had done long since."

"Thou fool," answered the chief. "Dost know my name?"

"I care not a die for the name of a doltish boor."

Hereward leapt from his horse and seized the stranger's bridle.

"Hold! art tired of thy life? I am Hereward!"

"Yea verily am I weary thereof since Midgard holds yet unhung such rogues as Hereward."

Hereward whipped out his sword and the stranger, dismounting at the same time, did in like wise. The next moment Geri, Gwenoch and Matelgar were at it, hammer and anvil, with the other five. Geri, a splendid swordsman, quickly slew one of the strange knights and cut down another. Gwenoch and Matelgar each laid low his man, whereon the fifth sheathed his sword.

But of the leaders, what a fight was there! As the waves beating upon some mighty rock were Hereward's rushes to the stranger knight's defence. The famous Mercian strove again and again to pierce that solid guard in which sword, shield and eye worked all together. Again and again Hereward staggered back as the heavy parry met his blow and at last Geri cried aloud:

"Lord, thou art not thyself. Yield me, I pray thee, thy place against him."

"Stand back," roared Hereward, "never shall it be said that one of us needed another against a single foe."

As he spoke he dealt a tremendous blow upon the big knight's helm. All looked to see him drop, but what they did see was a shower of blue sparks and pieces of the famous sword whizzing around the heads of the combatants.

Hereward parried the blow the stranger gave at random

and like a forest lion sprang within his guard, stabbing at his face with the fragment of his blade.

"Thy second sword, Hereward," roared Geri. "Yield me thy place for thou art surely fey."

Hereward leapt back and whipping out the second sword which, as was usual with the Angles and Saxons, he bore on his right thigh, he sprang in again. The great man smote straight down on his head. Hereward warded the blow with his shield and at the same moment drave his sword into the middle of his foe's thigh. The warrior dropped upon his knees. Hereward slashed at him furiously, darting hither and thither, but never once did he pierce that iron defence.

"I would not slay thee; thou'rt too stout a champion," quoth he at last. "What is thy name?"

"I am Letwold, a true Englishman. Thou canst not say as much."

Hereward swore.

"Darest thou call me false? Thy life is in mine hand!"

"E'en take it then and wend thy way to the Norman Tanner for the price of thine honour."

Hereward's face was white with passion. He paused; then gave the word to wheel about, and as the four rode away all clearly heard the words:

"There goeth a great soul to its doom."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAGES OF SIN

Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
The dungeon of thyself; thy soul
* * * *
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut off from outward light
T' incorporate with gloomy night.

MILTON.

WHEN Hereward left the scene of his great fight, the thought struck him that he had by no means a meet following wherewith to come in to the king. So he returned and took with him forty other chosen knights. And thus they made their way to royal Winchester.

And William received him as he had been his very son, and Hereward knelt before the great man, and putting his hands between his, swore to serve him loyally.

"Before thy wisdom's might mere strength must bow," he said.

"The gain is ours, the honour all thine own, thou gallant Saxon. 'Tis we should bend our heads to thee," and linking his arm in Hereward's the king led him to the feast, where he caused his erst foe to sit at his right hand on the daïs. Judge how the Normans looked! But William made them drink to the health of the mighty English chief.

"He has proved himself many a time and oft the

better of any man here," said he. "And I, your king, intend to honour one of you with the hand of the daughter of our noble friend, even with the hand of fair Torfrida."

All looked up in expectation, and Hereward's face, which, in spite of all the court gaiety, had borne throughout a settled look of gloom, showed yet darker against the flare of the wax candles and cressets.

"And who is he, sire," he asked, "another woodcutter, perchance?" alluding to his niece Lucia, whose hand the king had bestowed upon Taillebois.

"Not so, my knight," answered William gaily. "Sir Hugh d'Evermue here. He is a high-born gentleman and loves your daughter. We deem it fitting that when the most handsome pair in England are united, his cup of joy should alike be filled."

Naught could be said. But Hereward's heart was black within him.

And so young Torfrida was dragged from Croyland and forced to be the bride of Hugh d'Evermue in the very same hour in which Hereward was united to the lovely Alftruda.

And William himself honoured the double marriage and drank repeatedly to the flower of England's beauty and her glorious mate. Thereafter he schemed with Taillebois, Warrenne and Hereward for the invasion of Maine, purposing to subdue the revolted city by the aid of an English host led by Hereward.

And so the great Saxon, the Champion of Liberty, did himself aid in the grinding down and oppression of a people striving for freedom.

But thereafter things went not well with him. The jealous Normans tried hard to find a champion who might pick a quarrel with and slay the famous Englishman. And should the conflict cost their man his life,

as was most likely, this in itself would give them a handle against the victor.

So at last a tall knight, Oger, a Breton of Dol, in appearance much stronger than Hereward, who had held the Bourne lands before Hereward's submission, and desired them again, was won over to insult him. So that Oger one day in full hall observed :

" Would to the devil that I had met thee at Ely, barbarian. There had then been many a brave knight living at this hour who now rots in his armour beneath thy foul morasses. And thou wouldst by now have sworn allegiance to yet another lord."

" Of a truth would it have been another thrall for the devil hadst thou met with me. But thou'rt alive to return to thy lean Bretons at Dol. Wherefore render thanks."

" Thou wilt fight ? " Oger flung down his glove.

Hereward kicked it contemptuously.

" No, I fight men," quoth he.

" By Heaven this is intolerable ! " Oger sprang to his feet, wine-cup in hand. Hereward's brows drew closer together.

" Throw not the wine, Sir Oger. Send first for a priest to shrive thee ! "

" Thou fearest ! " quoth Oger.

" Yea, for thee. Be not a fool. No Frenchman ever yet born was a match single-handed for Hereward. Thou hast been driven to this, so I pardon it. But urge me no further, lest I should strike thee."

But Oger, mistaking the Saxon's apparent reluctance to fight for fear, became the more eager himself. He drew near and in a sudden access of fury exclaimed :

" Dog of a barbarian Saxon, thou hast robbed me of the lands my good sword won at Senlac, and now thou

dost spurn my glove. Take that!" As he spake he struck Hereward a back-handed blow on the mouth.

The Saxon's eyes reddened and the next moment he lashed out at the tall Breton. Oger flew into the air and clean across the table, clearing it of goblets, dishes and what-not as he flew. He rolled into a corner of the room and lay there, a sorry sight.

"When thou art well of that stroke I will meet thee an thou art so dense a fool. And the sooner the better," quoth Hereward. He strode toward the door, and not a noble or knight but made room for him.

The next day Oger was as offensive as ever, and Hereward saw well the intent of the Normans, but unable to bear the repeated insults of Oger, at last went with him to a grove with three knights on each side to see fair play. And there they fought a great time without result. Then spake Hereward:

"I rede thee desist. It is foolish to fight here all day about naught."

Whereupon Oger thought his famous foe tired and almost overcome, and fought the harder.

So Hereward, having oft repeated his rede, at last lost control of himself and rained in his blows so fast and furious that the Breton's guard was beaten down, and his sword-arm cut through to the bone. Hereward swung round on his heel, and Oger was dragged, cursing, from the ground.

Then the Breton took counsel with Warrenne and Ivo, with the result that a strong guard under Sir Deda was sent by the king to arrest Hereward for brawling within the precincts of the court. When Deda saw his former host he bowed courteously.

"I crave your pardon, noble sir, for my part in that which it is my painful duty to perform." But Hereward

answered him never a word. He gave up his sword, and rode sullenly to Bedford Castle, where he was placed under the care of its chatelain, Robert de Horepol. There, with one chain attached to his ankles, he sat day after day, night after night, scarcely stirring. His mind seemed one vast blank, wherein naught but vague yet torturing thoughts might dwell. He thought of his great sin and repented it in a passive kind of way. He sorrowed, but it was rather at his folly in trusting the Norman. Despair, Despair alone and without Hope, Despair was lord of his mind. His guardian showed him great respect and sympathy, but got scarce a word from him. He readily allowed folk to view the famous captive in the hope that some of these might distract his thoughts. Among them came Leofric the deacon, and one disguised as a cook intending to purchase milk, a very cautious yet withal jocose knave.

Now Robert had just received the king's commands to send Hereward to Buckingham Castle, the chatelain whereof was a creature of Ivo Taillebois. Wherefore the good Sir Robert, seeing well whose hand was in this order, in the presence of Leofric and his companion exclaimed:

"Oh shame that so mighty a chief, once the lord of so many brave warriors, should be delivered into the keeping of a human fiend, his worst foe. Oh that those whom he formerly loaded with favours knew this. Full surely would they set on us between here and Buckingham Castle and free their lord."

The which, of course, happened, and so well was the ambush set by Geri that most of the Normans had no time to handle even their light arms. The knight riding next Hereward made to slay his captive, but Winter threw himself in the way and took the blow upon his own

byrnie. Then rushing in on the Norman he clove him to the chin.

Hereward, freed from ten chains, walked hither and thither amid the battle, bidding his house-ceorls spare Sir Robert and his knights, and calling aloud how that Sir Robert had saved his life, and he embraced that good knight warmly and the latter undertook to bear to the king a fair report of his erstwhile prisoner.

And so well did Sir Robert fulfil his promise that Hereward was fully restored to his heritage and infeft in all those lands which were Alftruda's dowry. And the first news he learnt was of the cruel execution at Winchester of Earl Waltheof, last of the powerful English nobles, for his temporary consent to the plot formed at the fatal Bridal of Norwich.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAMP FLARES UP

Who spilleth life, shall forfeit life;
So bid thy lord believe:
That lawless love is guilt above,
This awful sign receive.

Sir W. Scott.

AND so at last came Hereward to his heritage. Rich lands had he and promise of many more, for the king had sworn that he would raise him to the first earldom that should be vacant. He had many knights and house-ceorls for retinue, and wealth in plenty, for Alftruda brought him large estates in addition to those which had been his father's. He was still young, famous, mighty of strength as ever, and wedded to the fairest lady England could boast. What more could he need? Yet he was very far from happiness.

Rough and primitive as were many of his instincts, it was not possible that so powerful a mind could fail to know the ring of truth in the noble doctrines in which Torfrida had so carefully nurtured him. And with this came inevitably the first awakening to the full extent of his sin. And when the dawn thereof broke upon the strong soul, the day that followed was terrible indeed.

On his first return from Bedford, when he saw his lovely

young wife, her face suffused with tears of pity and smiles of welcome, the ice-bonds of his soul brake asunder, and he forgot all in the world save that at last Alftruda was his. For the first few days he plied her with extravagant worship, following her every step, bowing to her lightest nod, pressing his aid upon her in the most trivial household tasks. He laid every one in the hall under her yoke, swearing by every god the Norsemen knew, yea, and by those of the Christians, that even the least delay in obeying her orders should mean certain death within the hour, though the offender might be Geri, his own cousin. And Winter, who loved him more than any woman could have done, growled in his beard at the sight of Alftruda, calling her among the thralls Gudrun, that baneful name borne by her who by wedding great Sigurd, Brynhild's husband, had brought bale upon all three.

One day Hereward and Alftruda were riding in the direction of Deeping when there met them, bound likewise for the chase, the Lord of Deeping, Sir Hugh of Evermue, Hereward's son-in-law, and with him his fair young bride Torfrida. Hereward looked up from beneath his brows—he always looked at any one in that way now—and met her sorrow-stricken eyes in which a whole world of pain was expressed. His hand tightened so hard on the rein that his horse reared in the air, and he answered Sir Hugh's courtly Norman greeting, "*Salut à toi, mon père,*" with a savage growl. Alftruda would have stayed to kiss Torfrida, but the young lady unslung her bow as though she saw game, and Hereward dragged Alftruda's snorting palfrey onward by main force of arm.

As may be well guessed this meeting did not tend to strengthen the bond of kinship between Sir Hugh and his redoubted father-in-law. And Hereward needed friends.

All around him, as had been the case when his home was the greenwood, was a ring of Norman nobles, each, of course, with his armed following. Thorold and Ascelin were at Peterborough, and with them the Bretons, Oger and Raoul de Dol, with three of whom, it will be remembered, he was in deadly feud, while the fourth was blood-brother of the man Hereward had disabled. Then Taillebois at Spalding was not likely to allow kinship by marriage to weigh against the disastrous defeats his arms had suffered whenever he had taken the field against the mighty Saxon.

And now Hugh of Evermue, who, being a gentleman by birth, was more inclined to live on terms of peace with his wife's father, was mortally offended by the cavalier way in which the Lord of Bourne treated him. What restrained them all was not so much the fear of William's royal letters as of the weight of Hereward's right arm.

There was now no dealing with Hereward at all. His first action was to send to Croyland everything that might remind him of the days of old. Torfrida's jewels and arms had gone long ago. To kill time he ate and drank furiously, but seemed never the better or worse therefor. He spoke rarely and then nearly always to Winter. This was significant. Winter had always hated women.

At such times he would sit with Winter in the darkest corner of the gloomy hall growling out imprecations against the Normans, boasting loudly of what he had done and would yet do against them, railing at Fate, at William, at his own kin. It was in such black moods that Winter loved him best. The two would nod darkly together and finger their swords. Then Hereward:

"How many men can we gather, brother?"

"As many true Saxons as are in the land. I wot full well, lord."

Alftruda was terrified. She dared not counsel Hereward, and if he rose once more against the king, she felt that he was lost. She had not a single maid upon whom she could rely. And womanly love and pity she must have. There was the Lady of Ghent who had been so kind to her when a mere child in Northumbria. She would help, yea, was not Gilbert himself Hereward's friend? He would know, so wise was he always, what should be done for her lord's sake. When she asked Hereward for an escort he did not even demand where she was going. He scrawled his name on a scrap of parchment which she took to Geri, who raised his eyebrows.

"How many men will you have, noble lady?" asked he. "Our lord has left the number at your will."

"Gwenoch and Matelgar will go with fifty spears," said Alftruda.

Lady Ghent received her former charge with open arms. She heard the tale of woe with little sighs of pity which quite won Alftruda's trust.

"Ah, dear heart," quoth the worshipful lady. "I must commune with the Lord in secret before I can rede you in this; yea verily is there need. Do you take some wine, *ma mie*, and rest you after your toilsome faring." And she hurried out to commune in secret with—whom but the lord—Gilbert.

The latter was all smiles. "In one of these troll-ridden moods we shall o'erreach him," he muttered in his beard, and went down to the courtyard of Lincoln Castle. There he sent bodes flying right and left, to Thorold, to Evermue, to Taillebois, to Warrenne, who had lands in Norfolk. Then went he up again and entered his hall with his usual frank, good-humoured smile.

His Flemish clerk passed him with a bow. Gilbert caught him by the shoulder and whispered for some minutes in his ear. The clerk nodded again and again, and then hurried away. Gilbert went to his high seat and made much of Alftruda.

"Ah, ah," said he, when she had told him a little, "'tis no doubt that he is thinking of the earldom they say the king has promised him. Well, let him not fail to send the proper number of troops for the king's host gathering at Pevensey. I am attending a summons daily."

"Ah, will he have to fight abroad again?" asked Alftruda.

"In truth I think the king will scarcely require his person," said Gilbert, "but these troops are intended as a menace to that hot-headed madman of a French king who cannot profit by the example our great William gave him in Maine. Why, here surely *is* the summons!"

The clerk entered with a parchment with a huge seal hanging thereto. Gilbert ran his eye over it.

"Ah, the king desires me to transmit his will from Lincoln to the towns of Kesteven. Read this, dear. We will give Hereward swift notice that he may be, as ever, first in the field." He smiled viciously, but his tone was as smooth as ever.

"Oh, you are good!" cried Alftruda in glee. "Right glad am I that I came to you."

"You must set your own seal hereto, lady, for these men will not go to Pevensey unless they see it."

It was done without demur.

"Now let a light messenger mounted on my fleetest horse bear this document to Lord Hereward at Bourne," cried Gilbert. Then,

"Sweet lady, mine own knights shall escort you home.

But not I myself, lest he may yet trick us," he muttered aside.

Hereward read from the scroll that so many knights and men-at-arms were required from him as holding under the king, saw Alftruda's signet, and sent away all he had save a few knights and Ailward the priest, who had taken Leofric's place. Then he turned to the bode.

"Get thee within and fill thyself. The rest of my knights are at Lincoln and the king must await their return."

"My homage, beau sire," said the messenger, "but my orders are pressing."

"Get thee gone then, dog," growled Hereward, and the rider was gone with the speed of the wind.

The next two days were spent in the chase. The third day was a very hot one, and having eaten their midday meal, Hereward placed Ailward on guard on the top of one of the great banks surrounding the hall. He then sat down with Winter beneath a fair tree, and they pledged each other many a time.

"All is ready," quoth Hereward. "I only need the return of the knights."

"Ay and a great ferlie is it that they are not here before," growled Winter.

"I have friends in every town."

"Ay lord, the English will rise throughout the land."

"Let us drain one more bowl to our victory, brother."

"Waes hael, lord," quoth Winter.

"Drinc hael to thee, trusty friend," replied Hereward.

After this Winter slept, but Hereward continued drinking. His thoughts were in the bygone years and the whole of his life seemed to flash in successive pictures before his mind's eye. Some forty yards away his few

house-ceorls slept in clusters upon the grass. Upon the bank, leaning on his great Danish axe, stood Ailward, and had Hereward's own senses been more acute he must have seen that the man was sleeping. Some paces to the right, and in the northern corner of the entrenchments, was a great ring of rank dark green grass, one of those circles which simple folk call pixie rings. In the centre of this Hereward thought he saw the outlined form of a man, tall and majestic in mien. He stared hard, and the features became more clear, and lo! they were those of his father, Earl Leofric. The vision raised its hand in beckoning gesture and vanished. Another shape took its place, the form of a young man with fair golden locks, who signed to him with his hand as the former had done, and vanished. Well might Hereward wot that this was his ill-fated brother Alfgar. His place was taken by a young boy with a strong likeness to him, and behold! it was now young Godwin, foully slain, who stood within the ring. And who were those three women, two of whom seemed nuns, and the third a fair young girl with his own features? Hereward strove to rise, but it seemed to him as if his limbs were frozen to earth, and he might not stir. He gripped Winter by the shoulder, but the warrior slept on. He passed his hand across his eyes and what was this? They were all standing around him. Then the dreary monotone of a church bell smote upon his ear, once, twice, thrice, and lo! he knew the note of the great bell of Croyland. The shapes vanished, and a deafening peal of thunder reverberated through the air with a hissing sound, but not the sound of rain. Ailward on the bank opposite flung up his arms and pitched heavily backward upon the grass. Hereward rose slowly, and Winter sprang up at his side. The house-ceorls were flying

everywhere in wild affright. The banks were alive with armed men.

Weapons of the chase were at hand, but of byrnies the Saxons had none. Hereward buckled on his sword, and the two snatched their ash-spears from the tree-trunk against which the weapons stood. Then Hereward gripped Winter's hand.

"To-day we pass side by side through the gold-ringed door, true friend," said he.

And Winter:

"I ask no better, dear my chief."

And then the storm, imminent for an hour, burst in thunder upon the scene. The jagged lightning flashed around as down the bank rushed the knights, Ascelin, Evermue, the Bretons, Taillebois, and a score of others. What was that flutter of white against the green? The cruel Fleming lord had so contrived that Alftruda should witness the wreck her folly had wrought!

Hereward threw back his head and laughed; then he cried aloud:

"'Tis a fair company that comes to see how Hereward can die. Lady, we are honoured in your presence. See now how men fight."

He was clothed in his tunic only, and a knight sprang forward.

"Villain, show where thy chief hides or die the death!" And he raised his lance.

"Have thou this greeting from him," quoth Hereward. And his spear, driven downward with the force of a war-engine, went clean through the kite-shield, the mail-coat, the body beneath, and pinned the wretch to the sward. Hereward set his foot on the corpse and tore the spear forth. He looked up from beneath his eyebrows.

"Felons, traitors," he roared, "the king hath given

me his truce. Dishonoured knights, ye seek my life! By Penda's soul, full dear shall ye buy it. Have at ye, cowards."

And he ran slowly towards them, Winter at his back.

The Normans rushed to meet him with a shout of joy, and there was close lance-thrusting, butcher's work this. The fair girl watching, unable to take her eyes from that which appalled yet fascinated her, saw the mailed men break back. There were dark smudges on the green-sward between them and the baresark Saxons.

Hereward ground his teeth.

"Come on ye shrinking hounds. We shall be cold and stiff with waiting for ye." They took him at his word and closed in upon the two. Slash, stab, parry. Again the ring gave back. Thinner this time, yes. Twelve dead men lay around one golden-haired form in the midst. His spear had gone, but his sword cut figures in the air, and the Normans shrank from it. One thought, and one alone, now filled Hereward's mind, and the cloud of care that had veiled his face for months past had given place to a look of peace. A spearman ran at him and went down upon his dead comrades, the splinters of Hereward's shattered sword raining upon him.

"Now," cried Taillebois, "to his back, knights." And he set the example.

Hereward quickly slid his round shield from his arm and dashed it down, once, twice, on the helmed heads around him, a man falling at each stroke.

Then with four lances driven clean through his back, he sank to his knees.

"We are at peace now, wife. I have paid the wer-geld," he muttered.

A dark face towered above him with sword aloft in both hands.

Hereward looked up and laughed—a rattling laugh—as he smashed his shield with awful force into that dark face and sank slowly forward.

There was a long pause, the ten or twelve knights remaining, stared at each other, and at the terrible foe beneath them.

Then said Taillebois :

" The English will never rise again."

" The sun of England hath set indeed," answered Ascelin. " Oger, pick up your brother."

Oger raised Raoul de Dol ; it was he who had received the Saxon's last stroke. Hereward's mark was plainly set on him. His face could not be seen for the brains scattered thereon.

" Now by the virtue of God, I never saw such a man. Had England owned four of his like, they had chased King William from English ground, or we had all found our graves here," swore Ascelin.

And he swore repeatedly, muttering, " Nay, by Roland's soul, never shall such an one be seen again."

The Norman band filed slowly into the hall of Bourne, and the helm of darkness o'ershadowed the land. A sound of sweet singing floated in the calm summer air. The Normans, well in their cups, heard it not. But the stricken girl upon the bank heard it and raised her head.

A tall nun was kneeling amid the carnage. Her thin white face shone clear in the moonlight. Every now and then she stooped and whispered to a form that lay face forward in the midmost of that ring of the dead.

" Peace be to thee, great heart. Welcome my Hereward, mine once more, for ever ! "

There was a ring of calm exultation in these last words that struck some hidden chord in poor Alftruda's heart. She came quickly towards the nun.

"Woman, you lie. He is mine and has ever been mine. He never loved you."

The nun turned calm, unseeing eyes upon the girl's face, but answered not one word.

Alftruda's heart was rent asunder by the sight of that dumb suffering.

"Torfrida, forgive me, for Holy Mary's sake, forgive me. Oh, for pity's sake!"

And when no answer came, the Saxon princess, kneeling there in the blood and mire, spake once more: "Torfrida, pray this for me, which I pray now, that I may die."

Then the nun answered:

"Why wouldst thou die?"

"He is dead—I have lost him."

"Then thy love is no more?"

"Surely it died with him."

"Then love is naught save it be requited?"

"My love was never requited. He ever yearned for thee again."

"Thou fool, what else didst thou deem? Love looks for no reward. It gives and asks naught. It hopes, but wins—on earth never. It burneth the soul black, but looketh for no balm to ease the self-given torture. But the sacrifice is so glorious that Love rejoiceth in its self-inflicted bane. Go, ceap-woman, and learn that the soul deals not with bargains."

Alftruda dragged herself to the bower within the hall. A ribald jest or two from the knights followed her. But from without the song flowed up to Heaven once more, no longer soft and mournful, but loud, triumphant, rejoicing.

"The Nun answered not one word"

Presently an answer came, many voices in soft unison, and a number of the monks of Croyland with their abbot, Ingulf, stood around Torfrida. At a sign from her they took up the body, when the Normans issued from the hall and Taillebois sternly forbade them. But Hugh of Evermue, Lord of Bourne, waved his hand in token of permission given. The abbot lifted two fingers in benediction, the black-robed monks placed the body of England's champion reverently upon a litter and bore it to a barge by the water's edge.

And as they slowly moved away towards Croyland, mingling with the dip and splash of the oars and the wild cries of the mere-birds, a sweet chant arose once more. The monks were imploring the all-loving Creator for that great though wayward soul that had lately winged its way to His Mercy Seat. Between the pauses in their prayers a wild sweet voice was heard, a voice of hope and prophecy, chanting the glorious future of the land which could breed such warriors as Hereward Leofricsson.

They laid him to rest with dirge and psalm in the south choir of Croyland's ancient minster. Let us all echo the prayer with which the old chronicler of Peterborough closes his pages:

Cuius animae propicietur Deus. Amen.

PRONOUNCING INDEX

THE exact sounds of Old English vowels can be but approximately shown. Generally speaking, the Classical languages as pronounced by the "Continental Method" or a modern foreign language would be a safer guide to the pronunciation than would Modern English.

For the sounds of the old Norse names in this list I am indebted to my talented friend and fellow councillor of the Viking Club, D. Auchterlonie, M.A. For the Old English words I am responsible. A bracket around a vowel as in Favn(i)r indicates that the vowel is short by nature, but approximates to the long sound owing to the —r which follows.

KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

āē ae	as in	bare, man.
ā a	as in	bar, blast.
ō o	as in	lone, hoard.
ī i	as in	machine, thin.
ē e	as in	obey, fen.
ēo, e o		ē + o, e + o.
ū,u	as in	dune, bull.
ȳ y	almost as in	seen, chin.

Ælfric	Alfrīc
Alef	ālev
Ælfthryth	Alfthr(ī)th (almost*
Ætheling	Ath-e-ling
Beowulf	Bē-o-wulf
beotword	bē-ot-word
Cædmon	Kædmon
ceap	chēap
cempaman	chempa-mān
ceorl	chēorl
Fafnir	Favn(ī)r
Githa	Gītha
Godric	Gōdrīk
Godiva	Gō-dī-va (a Latinised form)
Haco	Hākō
Hereward	Her-e-wārd (a as in " hard ")
Hoibricht	Ho-ī-brīcht (ch as in Scotch " loch ")
Leofric	Lēovrik † (almost)
Leofwin	Lēovwīn † (almost)
Loki	Locki
Mercia	March-ī-a
Sigurd = Sigurð	Sigurth
Sigtryg	Sichtri (ch). (First ch almost as in Scotch " loch ")
Siward	Sīwārd (a as in " hard ")
Sleipnir	Slēpn(ī)r
Swegen	Swēn
theow	thēow
Thorbiorn	Thōrb-yirn
Thurstan	Thurstān
Tostig or Tosti	Tostī
Uchtred	ūchtred (ch as in Scotch " loch ")
Ulf	Ulv
Valhalla	Val(h)ill(h)

* " The true sounds of y and ȳ are most readily produced by placing the lips in the position for pronouncing long oo, and while retaining the lips in this position, pronouncing respectively the i in it and the ee in deem."—Prof. Albert S. Cook.

† In these two names the *o* was most probably scarcely heard.

Viking	Wīking
waes hael	wes hēl
Waltheof	Wael-thē-ov
Witanagemot	Wīt-ena-gemōt
Wulfric	Wulfrīk
Wulfstan	Wulfstān
Wyrd	Würd (as in Ger. dünn)

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